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Representations of Self and City in Botticelli's Illustrations of Dante's Commedia

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Representations of Self and City in Botticelli's Illustrations of Dante's *Commedia*

An Undergraduate Thesis Submitted to the College of Arts and Sciences
for the Completion of College Honors

by

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Introduction

Sandro Botticelli's ninety-two illustrations of Dante Alighieri's *Divina Commedia* represent a fifteenth-century product of Florentine civic pride, the reclaiming of Dante as the defender of Florence, the rising status and intellect of the artist, and the elevation of painting as a prestigious liberal art. Both Botticelli and Dante are the shining examples of innovative artists for their respective time periods. Dante established the foundations for Italian literature in his *Divina Commedia* in the early 1300s, and Botticelli created authentic artistic Renaissance icons in his paintings like the *Primavera* (1482, Florence) and *The Birth of Venus* (1486, Florence). In Botticelli's illustrations, he outlines the topography and narrative of the three realms of the *Commedia* while simultaneously communicating his knowledge as an artist and deep understanding of the text to the viewer.

In 1265, Dante was born in Florence. At the age of nine, as described in his *La Vita Nuova*, Dante fell in love with a young Florentine girl named Beatrice. For Dante, Beatrice became the symbol of love. Her name literally means she-who-blesses¹, and therefore she became his philosophical muse and motivation throughout his writings. In the *Commedia*, Beatrice, as well as Virgil, initiated Dante's long journey to salvation through the realms of Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise. Due to his complicated political affiliations with the Black and White Guelphs, Dante was exiled from Florence on January 27, 1302. Dante wrote the *Commedia* during his exile from Florence, and traveled through many Italian cities while depending on the charity of different lords. His *Commedia*, therefore was a first-hand commentary on the political struggles of Florence and its relationship to other Italian cities and international powers like the

¹ Allen Mandelbaum, *Inferno: Dante in His Age* (New York: Bantam Dell, 1982), 320.

papacy and the Holy Roman Empire. Throughout the *Commedia*, Dante offers his own political and philosophical criticisms regarding the decay of Florence and Italy.

Additionally, in the *Commedia*, Dante created measurable realities of the three possible locations of the afterlife, while simultaneously offering a philosophical discourse on the soul's journey towards God. In the beginning of the *Commedia*, Dante explores the depths of *Inferno* with his ancient Roman guide, Virgil. The topography of *Inferno* consists of nine different circles of suffering, each representing a certain sin. Throughout his journey, Dante encounters ancient and contemporary historical figures in their respective circles, where they suffer excruciating punishments like floating in a boiling river of blood, or being clothed in flames. In the last canto, Dante descends to the deepest circle where he encounters Lucifer, Judas, Cassius, and Brutus. Finally, Dante and Virgil descend Lucifer's body and arrive on the outskirts of Purgatory.

In *Purgatorio*, Dante and Virgil ascend the mountain of Purgatory which resides on the southern hemisphere of Earth, which is directly opposite the northern hemisphere. The mountain itself represents the penitence of the Christian life, where the souls endure purgation of their sins before they enter Paradise. The setting of *Purgatorio* consists of ante-Purgatory or Purgatory proper. Dante and Virgil travel through Ante-Purgatory, the home of the late repentants. Before he is able to travel through Purgatory proper, an angel that guards the entrance carves seven P's on Dante's forehead, which cleared once Dante has purged his soul of sin. There are seven terraces on Purgatory proper, with each terrace of the mountain representing one of the seven deadly sins. The ascent up the Mount of Purgatory is primarily a means of education for Dante. Throughout his journey, Dante learns that "love is the seed in you of every virtue/and of all acts

deserving punishment.”² At Dante’s arrival in the Earthly Paradise in Canto XXXI, he finally meets Beatrice, the reason behind his journey through the three realms. She directs him to write down everything he sees in his journey so that he may share his experience through poetry. At this point, she becomes his guide through Paradise.

In *Paradiso*, Dante’s experience through Paradise surpasses all physical boundaries of his own world. The text is based on the four cardinal virtues (Prudence, Justice, Temperance, and Fortitude) and the three theological virtues (Faith, Hope, Charity). *Paradiso* consists of nine spheres that Dante and Beatrice travel through: Moon, Mercury, Venus, Sun, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Fixed Stars, and the Primum Mobile. Primum Mobile is the last sphere that Dante can physically comprehend in his own earthly terms. In the Empyrean, all concepts of space and time are irrelevant since the Empyrean is non-material. Throughout *Paradiso*, Dante asks many questions, so like *Purgatorio*, the main purpose of the journey is for his own education. It is Dante’s responsibility, which is emphasized by Beatrice, that he must be the scribe of his journey so that he can transmit the information he learns to humanity when he returns to Earth. In Paradise, Dante learns that every single motion is motivated by love, which is represented in God’s light. Dante also learns about the definition of the free will of the blessed, who unlike the free will of humankind, their free will is aligned with God. In this way, they are accepting of God’s Divine Justice. The *Commedia* proved to be so fundamental for Italians and especially Florentines, due to it being written in Tuscan vernacular, because it discussed the various ways in which a human can achieve blessedness and avoid sin. Furthermore, the text simultaneously

² Dante Alighieri. *Purgatorio*, trans. by Allen Mandelbaum (New York: Bantam Dell, 1982), XVII, ln. 104-105, 157.

praised ancient literature and culture, and commented on the contemporary political and cultural situations of Florence and Italy.

Both Dante and his *Commedia* were near perfect mechanisms for fifteenth-century Florentines to promote civic pride. During the late fourteenth century, humanists began to focus on ancient texts, while at the same time, they glorified the prestige of the Florentine vernacular by studying the texts of Boccaccio, Petrarch, and Dante. Sherry Roush's *Speaking Spirits: Ventriloquizing the Dead in Renaissance Italy* (2015) discusses the concept of *eidolopoeia* (idol making) in the context of fifteenth-century Florence and the motives of civilians for creating these idols for political, social, and economic reasons. Roush's book provided context regarding the relevance of fifteenth-century commentary of the *Commedia*, as well as providing anecdotes that supported this relevance.

At this time, Florentine civic identity could be characterized most certainly by its extreme pride. Therefore, Dante's *Commedia*, which was written by a Florentine, in the Florentine vernacular, became extremely popular. Thus, the Florentines regarded the *Commedia* as evidence of the superiority of Florence. The unavoidable irony in this was Dante's clear disdain towards Florence in his *Commedia*. Not only was he exiled from Florence, but during his exile, he experienced first-hand the internal corruption of Florence and other Italian cities. Yet, fifteenth century Florentines, like Cristoforo Landino, the commentator of the first Florentine edition of the *Commedia*, addressed this irony in humanist ideology by over-allegorizing Dante's intentions and injecting Florentine civic pride into the analysis of Dante's text. In this way, Florentines reclaimed Dante as the defender of Florence and as a symbol of Florentine dominance. Deborah Parker's *Commentary and Ideology: Dante in the Renaissance* (1993) provided a great deal of information on the Trecento and Quattrocento commentaries on the *Commedia*. Parker discusses

the various sections of the Trecento commentaries and how these sections were remodeled to fit Quattrocento ideology. One of her main arguments is that the *Commedia* is a platform for political and cultural discussion, therefore the meaning of the text can change over time. Her work helped to illuminate the political motives of Landino's edition of the *Commedia* in order to demonstrate the importance of Botticelli's involvement with the work.

Since the *Commedia* was written in the vernacular, the superior Florentine text was available to almost every citizen.³ In 1328-33, Guido da Pisa, one of the first commentators of the *Commedia*, stated that Dante was writing "on a wall, that is, an open and public place, for the benefit of all."⁴ In this way, the *Commedia* was able to maintain its reputation as one of the most important Florentine texts because it continued to be legible by Florentines through the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Therefore, not only did the *Commedia* support the civic pride of Florentines, but it popularized literature in the vernacular. As a result, scholarly works written in the vernacular grew, therefore the knowledge of the Florentine citizens grew.

Artists of the fifteenth century were certainly affected by the expansion of civic intellectual accomplishments. In 1435, Leon Battista Alberti, a fifteenth-century Florentine architect, was the first to write about the artistic theory of Renaissance art in his masterpiece *De Pictura*.⁵ His main objective of *De Pictura* was to raise painting, architecture, and sculpture to the status of liberal arts. Before the mid-fifteenth century, painting, architecture, and sculpture were not considered liberal arts, but were considered manual labor, which was one of the lowest ranking occupations of the Middle Ages and early Renaissance. One of Alberti's main arguments was that since painting, architecture, and sculpture required the use of geometry,

³ Ronald Lightbown. *Sandro Botticelli Life and Work*. Vol. 1, (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978), 151.

⁴ Da Pisa, as quoted by Nick Havely. *Dante* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 227.

⁵ The text was first written in vernacular, and then in Latin.

which was a prestigious liberal art, they must be considered a reputable addition to the liberal arts field. As a result, painting, sculpture, and architecture became a distinguished piece of the liberal arts field, thus the artist too was gaining a new image as an intellectual rather than just a craftsman.

Through the process of raising the intellectual status of manual arts, scholars realized the strong relationship between painting and poetry. A term used to express the similar abilities of poetry and painting was “ut pictura poesis” (as in painting, so in poetry), which derived from Horace’s *Ars poetica*, written in 19 B.C. This term carried great deal of legitimacy for the humanists due to its ancient origin. In this way, painters and poets were becoming equals. Martin Kemp’s “From Mimesis to Fantasia: The Quattrocento Vocabulary of Creation, Inspiration and Genius in the Visual Arts” (1977) and David Rosand’s “Ekphrasis and the Generation of Images” (1990) focused on developing definitions of *invenzione*, *mimesis*, *ekphrasis*, and *fantasia* that artists used to elevate poetry to the status of painting. Overall, Francis Ames-Lewis’s book *The Intellectual Life of the Early Renaissance Artist* (2000) is the most resourceful, as it covers the development of the rising status of the artist very thoroughly. Ames-Lewis focuses on the artist’s education and training, the life of a Renaissance artist, the relationship between painting and poetry regarding the artist’s status, *invenzione*, *ekphrasis*, and the development of the artistic license.

A great deal of scholarship exists on the life of Renaissance artists and their changing status. Most of the scholarship has focused on the education of artists, the guilds they were members of, and the developing individual style of their artwork. Michael Baxandall’s *Painting and Experience in the Fifteenth Century* (1972), *The Changing Status of the Artist* (1999) by Emma Barker, Nick Webb, and Kim Woods, and Martin Wackernagel’s *The World of the*

Florentine Renaissance Artist (1938) are major contributors to the field. Baxandall takes a social approach where his main argument is to demonstrate the style of Renaissance painting as representative of the experiences of artists' daily life. Barker, Webb, and Woods present case studies of single artists or artistic practices to demonstrate the changing status of the artist in the second half of the fifteenth century. Martin Wackernagel's book, first published in 1938 in German, explores the Florentine artwork and its relationship with the patrons, workshops, business practices, and the demand for art in Florence. Wackernagel's book focuses on the change in commissions from the late fourteenth century to the early fifteenth century. For example, the size started as smaller commissions from patrons like Lorenzo de' Medici, to larger commissions like Florentine monuments. Considering there is not a large amount of biographical information on Botticelli, these works proved to be very helpful for supplying context regarding the artistic world of Florence in which Botticelli lived.

Sandro Botticelli was born in Florence in 1445, just a few years after Alberti published his *De Pictura*. Very little is known on Botticelli's early life, yet Ronald Lightbown's biography *Sandro Botticelli Vol. 1* (1989) and *Sandro Botticelli: Life and Work* (1978) provide a substantial amount of information on his life, commissions, and relationship with Italian, and especially Florentine, citizens. Botticelli became an apprentice to Fra Filippo Lippi in 1462.⁶ Botticelli's career expanded thanks to his support from Lorenzo de' Medici. Lorenzo helped publicize Botticelli's work, and therefore his works were desired by high-ranking Italian families, so that they could be more closely associated to the Medici. Michelle O'Malley's essay, "Finding Fame: Painting and the Making of Careers in Renaissance Italy," provided a great deal of information on Botticelli's commissions that eventually landed him the honor of painting the

⁶ Lightbown (1978), 20.

frescoes in the Sistine Chapel in Rome. O'Malley's essay focuses on how Botticelli's political affiliations and actual placement in his neighborhood catalyzed his career as a sought-after artist in Florentine society. Joanna Woods-Marsden's book, *Renaissance Self-portraiture: The Visual Construction of Identity and the Social Status of the Artist* (1998), expands on the innovative concept of self-portraiture regarding the newfound intelligence of the Renaissance artist. Her book indicates that the invention of self-portraiture was a result of the artist's campaign to bring painting to the same status of the liberal arts, which was the inward thinking of humanist philosophy influenced. Woods-Marsden's book focuses on how the self-portrait was a Renaissance invention. She argues that self-portraits are a visual representation of the changing status of Renaissance artists and their aspirations to be seen at a higher status. Botticelli's *Adoration of the Magi* (1475, Florence), commissioned by Gasparre del Lama, included the members of the Medici family, and an astoundingly confident self-portrait of Botticelli, which directly associated him with the Medici.

Through his relationship with the Medici, Botticelli was given the commission to illustrate the cantos of Dante's *Commedia* for Cristoforo Landino's Florentine commentary. This commission not only proves that the Florentines thought it necessary to have illustrations accompany the first Florentine edition of the *Commedia*, but also indicates that humanist scholars such as Landino trusted Botticelli with the task of accurately visually representing the glorified text of Florence's Dante. Scholarly works on the illustrations have not been as extensive as works on Botticelli's *Primavera* or *Birth of Venus*, and most of the works on the illustrations simply give short explanations on the illustrations' significance in the larger intellectual sphere of Florentine artists.

Kenneth Clark's *The Drawings by Sandro Botticelli for Dante's Divine Comedy: After the Originals in the Berlin Museum and the Vatican* (1976), is one of the most important works regarding Botticelli's illustrations. It was one of the first works that focused on every existing illustration and offered a summary of the canto and a descriptive analysis of the illustration. Published in 1976, this was the first time the illustrations had been reproduced since Friedrich Lippmann's 1887 work. Friedrich Lippmann's *Drawings by Sandro Botticelli for Dante's Divina Commedia* presented reduced facsimiles of the original illustrations from the Royal Museum, Berlin, and the Vatican Library. Lippmann's work consists of an introduction that includes a brief biography of Botticelli, an analysis of his artistic style, the presence of Dante in the Renaissance, the genesis of the illustrations, and their rediscovery in Lippmann's own century. Additionally, Lippmann provides commentary on each of the cantos of the *Commedia* and their corresponding illustrations. Clark's work, although impressive and extremely detailed, follows almost the same format of Lippmann's.

Hein-Th. Schulze Altcapenberg's book, *Sandro Botticelli: The Drawings for Dante's Divine Comedy*, proved to be the most helpful for my research. Like Clark, this book offers each existing illustration with a summary of the canto and a descriptive and symbolic analysis of the illustration.⁷ Altcapenberg's book offers an extensive introduction that commented on the commission, form and technique, the illustrations' dates, functions, and Botticelli's narrative techniques. The end of the book includes a series of essays that deal with the historical and cultural context of the illustrations, previous illuminated manuscripts of the *Commedia*, and a deeper analysis of Baldini's engravings for the 1481 Florentine edition.

⁷ I primarily used this book instead of Clark's because it was published in 2000 and it gave more in depth analyses of the illustrations.

Despite these main works on Botticelli's illustrations, there is not a great deal of existing work regarding the illustrations that went as in depth as Clark's, Lippmann's, and Altcappenberg's. Even Clark's and Altcappenberg's works do not address how these illustrations are a clear indication of the rising status of the artist. Frequently, any mention of the illustrations often consists of only a paragraph or two. Many scholars use the same quote from Vasari's *Lives* regarding the illustrations that Botticelli wasted "a great deal of time on it, and since he did no other work he brought infinite disorder to his life."⁸ The anecdote from the *Anonimo Magliabechiano* appeared often, which stated that Botticelli "painted and worked with the stories of Dante on vellum, which was held to be a marvelous thing."⁹ Additionally, scholars often mention the illustrations in relation to other works of Botticelli. For example, Max Marmor's "From Purgatorio to the 'Primavera': Some Observations on Botticelli and Dante," he focuses mostly on comparing Botticelli's illustration of *Purgatorio* XXVII to his *Primavera*. Marmor's essay proved to be helpful because it supplied detailed information on Lorenzo de' Medici's interest in Dante as well as Cristoforo Landino's involvement and interest in Dante during the Renaissance. Finally, Barbara J. Watts's essay "Artistic Competition, Hubris, and Humility: Sandro Botticelli's Response to 'Visibile Parlare,'" helped as a guide for the analysis of each illustration. Watts focuses only on Botticelli's illustration of *Purgatorio* X, however, and does not give an in depth analysis on other illustrations.

My intention with this thesis is to comment on the illustrations' place in the changing status of the artist, the civic pride of Florence, and the reclaiming of the posthumous Dante in Florence. Botticelli's illustrations of the *Commedia* should be raised to a higher status than just

⁸ Vasari, as quoted in Richard Stapleford. "Vasari and Botticelli." *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 39, no. 2/3 (1995): 400, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27654408>.

⁹ Max C. Marmor, "From Purgatory to the 'Primavera': Some Observations on Botticelli and Dante." *Artibus et Historiae* 24, no. 48 (2003): 201, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1483739>.

unfinished illustrations. They are one of the first complete set of illustrations of a text that is undoubtedly the most impressive product of Italian literature. Furthermore, the illustrations are an excellent example of the rising status of the artist during the 15th c. because they demonstrate complete artistic freedom, which was a new development for artists at the time. Botticelli perfectly grasped the way in which Dante conveyed the changing tones of the canticles, and in the illustrations, we see that Botticelli was able to convey these tones through different artistic motifs. These motifs were clear examples that Botticelli was aware of the new developments in artistic theory, and through his illustrations, he himself was able to contribute innovations to the artistic field. Therefore, the illustrations should not be considered just an artistic depiction of the text, but an educated commentary and visual translation by Botticelli of Dante's *Commedia*.

Chapter One: Dante Commentary in the Renaissance

During the Renaissance, humanist writers like Francesco Filelfo, Cristoforo Landino, and Girolamo Benivieni praised Dante as the “defender of the homeland.” During the 1460s, Dante was becoming very popular in humanist intellectual circles. The humanists of Medicean Florence were admirers of Plato, and in 1468, Marsilio Ficino claimed that Plato was an influence for Dante’s *Commedia*.¹⁰ Therefore, the works of Dante (as well as Boccaccio and Petrarch) were more read than Homer or Virgil. The *Divina Commedia* became a “household book for the Florentines.”¹¹ The *Commedia* attracted attention due to its secular discussion on the three possible places of the afterlife. Not only did Dante create “measurable realities”¹² for Florentines, but he wrote about these realities in their spoken language. Due to his rising popularity, families of power wanted to restore Dante’s glory to Florence, since he had been exiled and died in Ravenna, never returning to Florence. On February 1, 1430, Leonardo Bruni wrote a petition to the Lord of Ravenna, Nastasio da Polenta, requesting the return of Dante’s remains, stating that “all our people have a singular and overwhelming affection and love for the glorious and unfailing memory of Dante Alighieri, the excellent and most renowned poet.... He adds to the splendour of our city and the light of his intellect illuminates the homeland.”¹³ Later, in 1476, Lorenzo de’ Medici was also involved with the attempted retrieval of Dante’s bones. Their attempts failed, however, and Dante’s remains still reside in Ravenna to this day.

Not only did powerful families like the Medici support and fund publications of the text, but their presence at lectures on Dante mattered greatly. On December 21, 1431, Francesco

¹⁰ Lightbown (1978), 56.

¹¹ Lightbown (1978), 151.

¹² Lightbown (1978), 56.

¹³ Bruni, as quoted by Sherry Roush, *Speaking Spirits: Ventriloquizing the Dead in Renaissance Italy*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 80.

Filelfo, a leading humanist, gave a *cattedra* lecture on Dante in Florence. The lecture was very well received, and it was stated that “a chair ought to be carried to and placed in the Church of Santa Maria del Fiore, or elsewhere, as it may place the said master Francesco, for the purpose of reading Dante.”¹⁴ Florentines were eager to listen to lectures on Dante in the largest and most culturally, religiously, and politically important cathedral in Florence. According to Vespasiano da Bisticci, the lectures were attended by two hundred people, some of whom were Filelfo supporters, anti-Medicean factions, and supporters of Cosimo de’ Medici.¹⁵ During this time, the competition between the Medici and the Albizzi was strong. The Medici were exiled in October of 1433, which was followed by their return and the exile of the Strozzi. Therefore, the lectures were often a way to express subtle political affiliations through the word of Dante. Filelfo was originally supported by Cosimo de’ Medici and Leonardo Bruni¹⁶. Yet, in a December lecture on Dante, Filelfo referred to the Medicean allies as “fools who misconstrued Dante’s audience and intentions.”¹⁷ He stated, “And although on the one hand, my reading of this divine poet, called by my most ignorant emulators, the reading material of cobblers and bakers, has brought me so much benevolence and favor through your generosity; on the other hand, so has it brought much hate and persecution among those envious of me; however, I will not withdraw nor stray from my honest and praiseworthy beginning.”¹⁸

Consequently, Filelfo became allies with anti-Medicean families like Rinaldo degli Albizzi and Palla di Onofrio Strozzi. At one point, Filelfo hired an Athenian writer to murder Girolamo Broccardi, the rector of the Florentine Studio, and Carlo Marsuppini, who replaced

¹⁴ Deborah Parker, *Commentary and Ideology: Dante in the Renaissance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 53.

¹⁵ Parker (1993), 53.

¹⁶ Roush (2015), 82.

¹⁷ Parker (1993), 53.

¹⁸ Benadducci, translated by Parker, (1993), 53.

Filelfo as the *cattedra* lecturer in 1431.¹⁹ In May 1433, Filelfo was attacked by the Medici allies, and due to his injuries, the attack led to his face being permanently deformed. Eventually, Filelfo received the sentence of *in absentia* – if he ever returned to Florentine territories, he would have his tongue cut out.²⁰ Therefore, the *Commedia* in Florence was not only used to express Florence’s cultural accomplishments, but its commentary and readings were used for political slanders.

The origin of Dante’s commentary really began with Dante himself.²¹ In his *La Vita Nuova*, he incorporated his poems into the narrative, which were followed by his own commentary and analysis. He often exchanged his poetry with poets like Guido Cavalcanti and Cino da Pistoia. The *Commedia* invited more people to comment on this work because it was written in the vernacular and included contemporary historical figures, therefore it appealed to a wide range of audiences. Students often studied the *Commedia* in grammar schools and universities, and both men and women heard lectures on the book in places like church or even the marketplace.²² The initial impact on its audience, however, was controversial. This was mostly because of the inclusion of contemporary historical figures, therefore relatives of those placed in Hell or Purgatory were dissatisfied with the work.

The controversy of the text was an invitation for commentary, yet overtime, there was a “gradual process of legitimization” of the text.²³ Shortly after Dante’s death in 1321, commentaries on the *Commedia* began to develop. Jacopo Alighieri, Dante’s son, was one of the first commentators and his *Chiose* of the *Inferno* was written in 1322 in Italian. Others like

¹⁹ Roush (2015), 82.

²⁰ Roush (2015), 82.

²¹ Parker (1993), 27.

²² Parker (1993), 31.

²³ Parker (1993), 31.

Anonimo Lombardo's commentary (1322-25) and Graziolo Bambaglioli's gloss to the *Inferno* (1324) were written in Latin.²⁴ Thus, the commentaries were being produced for a scholarly audience as well. The typical characteristics of Trecento commentary included an accessus, digressions, and allegory. The accessus was the commentator's introduction to the text, which often included descriptions of the commentary's interpretive procedures and its intentions. Digressions were explanations of certain words or phrases that often led to departures from the text. Boccaccio utilized digressions very frequently in his commentary of the *Commedia*, "shifting focus from the work to the subject of the digression."²⁵ This made Boccaccio's commentary extremely eclectic since there was so much opportunity for digression due to the extensive number of historical figures in the *Commedia*. Often, Trecento commentators used allegory usually to focus on the moral dimensions and significance. The purpose in their commentary was to explain that the text was to relate the allegorical meanings to the literal meanings of the text. Trecento commentators differed widely in their allegorical analysis; Jacopo Alighieri focused on the allegorical meaning in almost every detail, while Graziolo Bambaglioli took a more literal approach.²⁶

During the Renaissance, these features of Trecento commentary began to shift. Deborah Parker stated that the main feature of the *Commedia* for Quattrocento commentators was its heteroglossia, the commentators' intention to "bring an authoritative work in line with contemporary cultural, social, and political norms."²⁷ The *Commedia* was a philosophical, political, and social platform that commentators could expand upon, therefore its words could be

²⁴ Parker (1993), 31.

²⁵ Parker (1993), 40.

²⁶ Parker (1993), 43

²⁷ Parker (1993), 46.

twisted and turned according to current social and political situations. The best example of this is Cristoforo Landino's edition of the *Commedia*.

One hundred and sixty years after Dante's death, Cristoforo Landino's 1481 edition of the *Divina Commedia* was the first Florentine edition of the *Commedia* and it included nineteen of Botticelli's illustrations. Landino's 1481 interpretation became the most circulated commentary until Vellutello's commentary of 1544. The main purpose of Landino's edition was to refute the argument that Dante was anti-Florentine. The commentary was a celebration of Florentine nationalism and Neoplatonism and it dominated as the primary commentary for one hundred and twenty years. Landino was a leading humanist during the Renaissance and held the seat of rhetoric and poetry of the Florentine Studio from 1458 to 1497, giving lectures on Dante, Juvenal, Cicero, Virgil, Horace, and Petrarch. Landino believed that poetry was the most prestigious subject of study, more so than politics, history and philosophy, and "was central to a man's ethical and moral being."²⁸ According to Landino, poetry elevated civic and social virtues and the *Commedia* was the best example of this, being equal to and possibly more influential than classical texts. He stated that the *Commedia* was "vero imitare di Virgilio" and was the "divinità dello ingeno."²⁹

The commentary began with a sixty-two page *proemio*, which was the Quattrocento version of the Trecento's *accessus*. Landino's *proemio* consisted of six sections. The first, an "apologia nella quale si difende Dante e Firenze da' falsi calunniatori." The second praised Florence's language, music, painting and sculpture, civil rights, and commerce. Additionally, he listed Florentine military victories over Walter of Brienne, Venice, and Naples. The third section was a biography of Dante. The fourth section was divided into three discussions that explained

²⁸ Parker (1993), 91.

²⁹ Landino, as quoted by Parker (1993), 91.

the Neoplatonic basis of poetry: “che chosa sia poesia e poeta della origina sua divina e antichissimia,” its “futuro divino,” and “che l’origina de’ poeti sia antica.” The fifth section was a letter in Latin by Marsilio Ficino about the excellence of Landino’s commentary and Dante’s successful symbolic return to Florence. The last section was a description of the “sito, forma, e misura dello ‘nferno e statura de’ giganti e di Lucifero.”³⁰ The lengthy *proemio* was also a vehicle in which to raise the status of the Florentine vernacular. Both Landino and Lorenzo de’ Medici, the patron of the edition, were advocates for the eloquence of the Florentine vernacular. Landino expressed his disdain for commentaries in other dialects, especially those of Lombardia and Romagna. By stressing the “splendore del nome fiorentino d’eloquenzia,” Landino acknowledged Dante’s contribution to raising the status of the Florentine dialect, while simultaneously aligning himself with Lorenzo de’ Medici’s views on the vernacular. In his *Comento*, a series of lyrical poetry, Lorenzo stated that the expansion of the Florentine vernacular will lead to the Florence’s political growth of power as an empire.³¹

On August 30, 1481, the edition was unveiled to the Signoria with Botticelli’s engravings and was very well received. It was the first thoroughly illustrated edition of the poem and a combination of Dante’s earliest commentators. It also demonstrated the congruence of Dante’s ideas with those of Neoplatonism, and was considered an accomplishment as the “most thorough examination of Dante’s language to date.”³² In his career, Botticelli created two sets of illustrations: the nineteen illustrations for Landino in 1481, and the rest for Lorenzo Pierfrancesco de’ Medici, which are the basis of this thesis. The Landino illustrations were then engraved by Baccio Baldini for the edition. Baldini possibly became acquaintances with

³⁰ Parker (1993), 38.

³¹ Parker (1993), 91.

³² Parker (1993), 89.

Botticelli through his brother Antonio, and engraved the nineteen illustrations as copper plates.³³ The publisher, Niccolò della Magna, had difficulties printing because the illustrations became a complication. First, there needed to be relief printing for the text, and second, there needed to be *intagli* for the engravings. Therefore, some copies of the edition had no illustrations, others had one to two, while some editions had three or more.³⁴ Despite the difficulties, illustrated versions of the *Commedia* became very popular. In 1487, Bonino de' Bonino's published the edition (with Landino's commentary) with all nineteen illustrations. Many publishers outside of Florence also published the *Divina Commedia* with Landino's commentary. Yet, Landino's Florentine commentary still reigned as the supreme edition. The next Florentine edition was not published until 1506, and then 1572.³⁵

During the time of the commentary's publication, leading families were locked in competition to demonstrate their civic pride. This type of competition brought political turmoil between the wealthy families of Florence. The Pazzi Conspiracy occurred in 1478, just three years before the publication of Landino's commentary. The conspiracy, supported with the blessing of Pope Sixtus IV, occurred in the same cathedral where Filelfo's lectures on Dante occurred – the cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore. Plotted by members of the Pazzi family, the objective of the conspiracy was to displace the Medici as the rulers of Florence by assassinating Lorenzo and his brother, Giuliano. Although the plot failed, it resulted in the death of Giuliano. The conspiracy brought great vulnerability to the Medici from local families as well as foreign invaders,³⁶ therefore it was very important that Lorenzo could use the patronage of the *Commedia* as evidence of his civic dedication to Florence. Surprisingly, the result of the

³³ Lightbown (1978), 56.

³⁴ Parker (1993), 136.

³⁵ Parker (1993), 133.

³⁶ Parker (1993), 106.

conspiracy strengthened the position of Lorenzo as the ruler of Florence, since the Pazzi were banished from Florence as their punishment, which left the Medici with fewer adversaries in their vicinity.

The most efficient method that leading families used to demonstrate their pride was through patronage of the arts. Lorenzo de' Medici's association with the *Commedia* was a display of his eagerness to "create an image of cultural and political solidarity."³⁷ As Sherry Roush states, Lorenzo de' Medici supported this edition to demonstrate his authoritative rule after his brother Giuliano's death, while also, in the manner of his grandfather Cosimo "il Vecchio", used the edition as a means of "public self-imaging."³⁸ Lorenzo already had a great deal of influence over Florentine artistic patronage, therefore the combination of his patronage in the arts and funding the first Florentine edition of the *Commedia* was a very strong political move that demonstrated his civic pride.

Nonetheless, an obvious challenge arose for Landino in his depiction of Dante as a defender of Florence: Dante lacked a significant amount of civic pride; there were certainly instances in the *Commedia* when Dante expressed anti-Italian and anti-Florentine sentiments. Throughout the *Commedia*, Dante often chastises Italy for its corruption, "Squalid Italy, search round your shores and then look inland – see if any part of you delight in peace."³⁹ His contempt towards Florence was especially clear in *Purgatorio* Canto VI.

"My Florence, you indeed may be content that this digression would leave you exempt: your people's strivings pare you this lament. Others have justice in their hearts, and thought is slow to let it fly off from their bow; but your folk keep it ready – on their lips. Others refuse the weight of public service; whereas your people – eagerly – respond, even unasked, you shout: "I'll take it on." You might be happy now, for you have cause!

³⁷ Parker (1993), 107.

³⁸ Roush (2015), 85.

³⁹ Dante, *Purgatorio* VI, 82-87; Dante/Mandelbaum (1982), 53.

You with your riches, peace, judiciousness! If I speak truly, facts won't prove me wrong."⁴⁰

Many critics believed that in Landino's commentary, the *Commedia*'s literal sense was entirely neglected. Landino frequently downplayed Dante's disdain by over-allegorizing Dante's images. Parker believes, however, that those that critique Landino's in this way ignore the fact that the meaning of the *Commedia* can change over time.⁴¹ Landino used allegories to expand on the glories the Florentine republic. This was clear in Landino's commentary of *Inferno* XXXIV. Landino avoided Dante's obvious support of imperialism (demonstrated in his placement of Brutus and Cassius with Judas) by splitting Caesar into two men in his commentary: an intellectual and a power-hungry ruler.⁴² He discussed the great virtues of Caesar that were eventually overshadowed by his "tyrannical impulse."⁴³ Landino stated that Dante's true intentions were to damn the figures of Brutus and Cassius in order to symbolize "criminals who wrongfully murdered their prince."⁴⁴ Their placement in Hell was simply because they murdered a leader. In this way, Landino warned his own readers about consequences of treachery against a leader. It can be assumed that since the Medici funded this edition, anyone who participated in similar murderous actions against the Medici would suffer the same consequence as Brutus and Cassius.

To justify Brutus and Cassius's morality, Landino stated that they murdered the power-hungry component of Caesar, not the intellectual component. They murdered the Caesar who "villainously seized liberty from those whom he should have defended."⁴⁵ Therefore, Landino

⁴⁰ Dante, *Purgatorio* VI, 127-138 Dante/Mandelbaum (1982), 55.

⁴¹ Parker (1993), 76.

⁴² Parker (1993), 82.

⁴³ Parker (1993), 82.

⁴⁴ Parker (1993), 82.

⁴⁵ Landino, cited by Parker (1993), 83.

appropriated Dante's idea to be more in support of Florentine political ideology. Landino legitimized Brutus and Cassius's actions in stating that they carried out the murder "out of a most ardent love," and that they had "gone to meet death in order to liberate their homeland from the yoke of servitude."⁴⁶ He expanded on their murderous action by stating, "what could be considered a greater act of virtue than to vindicate an affront to one's country." In the deepest and most sinful circle of Hell, Landino justified the actions of two out of three of the circle's inhabitants for the main purpose of maintaining Dante's fifteenth-century Florentine reputation.

The objective of Renaissance scholars was to regain their dominion over Dante and create their own Florentine version of their idol. As Simon A. Gilson stated, Dante "continued to be appropriated in order to promote a certain vision of Florence as a pre-eminent capital of culture and learning, one which encompasses both the contemporary revival of classicism and the early legacy of Trecento vernacular poetry."⁴⁷ Commentary on Dante's *Commedia* fueled many political and cultural fires that were occurring during the fifteenth century in Florence. Commentary was at times a Florentine's way to express political affiliation with the backing of Florence's own prized citizen, Dante. Dante's disdain towards Florence, however, did not go unnoticed and fifteenth century commentators like Landino over-allegorized Dante's exclamations towards Florence to cover his contempt. Commentary on the *Commedia* also led to the text remaining relevant since the time of its publication. This was aided by the fact that it was written in the spoken language, therefore most citizens of Florence could understand the text. By examining commentary on the *Commedia* from its first publications to the editions of Renaissance Florence, we can see the ways in which the text was twisted and manipulated as a philosophical, cultural, and political platform for expression.

⁴⁶ Landino, cited by Parker (1993), 82.

⁴⁷ Gilson, as quoted by Roush (2015), 81.

Chapter Two: Botticelli, Humanism, and the Rising Status of Artists

The social status of Florentines at the beginning of the fifteenth century relied on a few components: their family's status, their social circle, their membership in associations, their marriage ties, and, most importantly, their occupation.⁴⁸ Painting had a very low standing as an occupation because it required more manual work than other noble professions, such as careers in law, the church, or politics. Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo were some of the first artists to express that art began in the mind and exited through the hand, therefore painting was an intellectual profession.⁴⁹ Towards the end of the fifteenth century, however, this began to change. This was mostly due to the new inward and individual thinking of humanist philosophy. A novel development, proposed by Pico della Mirandola in his *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, was that humans were in control of their destiny and therefore had the liberties to make the choices that led to their destiny.⁵⁰ Artists were beginning to see themselves as having natural born talent and were developing their own individual style. Wealthy families like the Medici, who frequently participated in humanist discussions, were keen on commissioning artwork from these artists. Having artwork from certain artists demonstrated their involvement in the culture of Florence, which simultaneously demonstrated their civic pride through the subject matter of the art that they commissioned.

The humanist movement in Florence was the main reason the status of art and the artist began to rise. Florentine architect Leon Battista Alberti's *De Pictura* was one of the first truly humanist works of literature on art. Alberti's book focused on laying the intellectual foundation of architecture, sculpture and painting. Out of sculpture, architecture, and painting, architecture

⁴⁸ Joanna Woods-Marsden *Renaissance Self-Portraiture: The Visual Construction of Identity and the Social Status of the Artist* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1998), 3.

⁴⁹ Woods-Marsden (1998), 4.

⁵⁰ Woods-Marsden (1998), 14.

was regarded with the highest esteem out of the three because it required the least amount of manual labor by the artist. Painting followed architecture, and sculpture was last in the ranking because it required the most manual labor. *De Pictura* attempted to raise painting to the status of the other liberal arts.⁵¹ During the fifteenth century, the liberal arts were defined as “knowledge that a freeman... was supposed to possess.”⁵²

The concept of liberal arts was established during the middle ages. During this time, the liberal arts were divided into two groups: the Quadrivium and the Trivium. The Quadrivium included arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and harmonies (music theory). The Trivium included more elementary skills like grammar, rhetoric, and logic. Those that studied the Quadrivium planned for a more intellectual career. There were seven mechanical arts that were divided between the Quadrivium and the Trivium. Weaving, the making of armor, and navigation were equated with the Trivium, and agriculture, hunting, medicine, living arts and sports, and architecture were related to the Quadrivium. During the Renaissance, humanists adapted this system by focusing less on logic and more on Latin, history, Greek, focusing heavily on poetry.

The newfound developments of humanism gave way to progresses in artistic practice, as emphasized by Alberti in his *De Pictura*. For example, an artist’s understanding of mathematics, anatomy, optics, geometry, mechanics, and theories about light and color was extremely helpful for the rendering of linear perspective, proportion, anatomical accuracy, and creating machines for architectural developments.⁵³ By the end of the fifteenth century, learning geometry was a must for the rendering of linear perspective. Therefore, since geometry was in a higher realm of learning, associating painting with the mathematics elevated its status. In 1506, Dürer wrote that

⁵¹ Which included the study of classical texts, history, moral philosophy, eloquence, poetry, rhetoric, etc.

⁵² Woods-Marsden (1998), 19.

⁵³ Sharon Bailin "Invenzione E Fantasia: The (Re) Birth of Imagination in Renaissance Art." *Interchange* 36, no. 3 (2005): 263, doi: 10.1007/s10780-005-6865-3..

illustrating accurate perspective demanded more knowledge than what was learned in schools. Even Alberti wrote that out of all the liberal arts, geometry was the most important for artists to understand.⁵⁴ As a result, it became important for artists to attend more challenging schools.

In the early fifteenth century, children that were born into higher class families usually went to humanist schools and would then pursue careers in law, the church, or politics. All fifteenth century boys went to primary schools (*botteghezza*) where they learned to read and write. Following the *botteghezza*, artisan class boys went to abacus school, while the privileged boys went to humanist schools.⁵⁵ At the abacus schools, from the ages of seven to eleven, they learned skills that helped with trading and commerce, like mathematics and the basics of literature and the common vernacular. The most prestigious abacus school was the school run by the Arte della Seta in Florence. The abacus schools differentiated from the humanist schools because at the abacus schools they were taught the vernacular and rarely taught Latin.⁵⁶ In fifteenth century Florence, to gain a higher social status, it was essential to have the knowledge of Latin. Some artists attended schools that taught Latin, while others from lesser families did not.

After abacus school, artists would attend workshops (*bottega*) where they would apprentice and focus on technique rather than originality. In the early fifteenth century, most artists came from an artisan class and were usually brought up in a family workshops. For example, Filippino Lippi learned from his father Fra Filippo, Giovanni and Gentile Bellini worked under their father, Jacopo.⁵⁷ Apprentices' practices mainly involved a copious amount

⁵⁴ Francis Ames-Lewis, *The Intellectual Life of the Early Renaissance Artist* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2000), 31.

⁵⁵ Some artists, like Alberti and Lorenzo Ghiberti, attended humanist schools as well.

⁵⁶ Ames-Lewis (2000), 19-22.

⁵⁷ Ames-Lewis (2000), 19.

of drawing and copying.⁵⁸ Jacopo Bellini's drawings of perspective became an essential book for artistic students and it was very popular in workshops. The book showed examples of "systems of narrative composition that often include complex perspectival schemes."⁵⁹ When looking at Botticelli's drawings of the *Commedia*, it seems possible that he would have studied from Bellini's books because of the varying types of perspective that Botticelli employed in his illustrations.

Additionally, the workshops were also a place for artists to be surrounded by an intellectual environment. Filippino Lippi's studio included books like Ovid (in vernacular), the Bible, Livy, and nine "recent" texts which were presumably by Dante, Boccaccio, and Petrarch.⁶⁰ As stated by Wackernagel, Baccio d'Agnolo's workshop became a place for "*belliismi discorsi e dispute d'importanza*" and even Botticelli's workshop, cited by Herbert Horne, was described as "*un academia di scioperati*."⁶¹ Later in the Renaissance, however, artists' studies became more academically challenging. The curriculum began to include grammar, geometry, arithmetic, anatomy, perspective and theoretical design.⁶² A crucial development in the artistic status was the establishment of the first school for artists. Founded by Lorenzo de' Medici in 1489, he established the Giardino di S. Marco, a school for artists that was directed by the sculptor Bertoldo di Giovanni, the Medici's sculptor and medalist. Artists that attended this school were therefore surrounded by the intellectual discussions of the humanist circles that occurred in the home of the Medici, which offered pieces from Lorenzo's own art collection for study.⁶³ This

⁵⁸ Ames-Lewis (2000), 35.

⁵⁹ Ames-Lewis (2000), 38.

⁶⁰ Ames-Lewis (2000), 21.

⁶¹ Despite *scioperati* being an unflattering term, artists gathering at Botticelli's workshop as an *academia* alludes to the artistic conversations they could have had in his workshop.

Martin Wackernagel, *The World of the Florentine Renaissance Artist*. Translated by Alison Luchs (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 350.

⁶² Bailin (2005), 264.

⁶³ Ames-Lewis (2000), 59.

school was “the first academy known to the history of art,”⁶⁴ therefore not only were the artists studying artistic practices, but they were also becoming artistic scholars. The reason this school was so revolutionary for the status of artists was because it “provided opportunities for intellectual development without the constraints of bottega organization.”⁶⁵ There were no commercial boundaries that a workshop would have, therefore the school was not entirely focused on manual production. The only purpose of Giardino di S. Marco was for the study of art.

Advances in artists’ education changed the outlook on art and the artist during the late 15th century. In Alberti’s *De Pictura*, he stated that *historia* is “the great work of the painter,” and *inventio* is the most important quality that separates an artist as a person with true talent rather than just a craftsman.⁶⁶ Due to this change, an increasing amount of commissions became intended for private and secular settings and these commissions were better documented starting in the second third of the 15th century.⁶⁷ Since these commissions were better documented, it can be assumed that this type of artwork carried a heavier appreciation than it would have earlier in the century. The originality of an artist’s creativity and individuality started to matter more to a patron.

With the economic boom of the 15th century⁶⁸, patrons were spending more money on art.⁶⁹ This meant there was a larger circulation of art in Florence, thus artists were gaining

⁶⁴ Wackernagel (1981), 262.

⁶⁵ Wackernagel (1981), 262.

⁶⁶ David Rosand, "Ekphrasis and the Generation of Images." *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics* 1, no. 1 (1990): 62, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20163446>.

⁶⁷ Wackernagel (1981), 295.

⁶⁸ Florence was the center of European wool trading, therefore the wealthy merchants that lived in Florence controlled the industry, thus a large amount of wealth was gathering in Florence. There was a strong sense of competition between merchant families, which was demonstrated through their patronage of artwork, monuments, and cathedrals.

⁶⁹ Bailin (2005), 260.

recognition for having real talent. A survey from Florence that recorded professional statistics from the end of the 1470s shows a large development of artistic professions, which clearly corresponds to an increasing amount of artwork commissioned by the upper-class.⁷⁰

Additionally, artists were being acknowledged for having their own style and individuality in their artwork.

As far as business matters go, artists did not have their own guilds, but were part of the guilds that supplied most of their materials. Painters were part of the guilds whose members included workers that painted furniture, chests, and shields.⁷¹ In Florence, there were seven major guilds with fourteen minor guilds. The guild to whom painters belonged, included apothecaries, doctors, drapers, barbers, sword-makers, sellers of meat and cheese, barbers, glove-makers, etc. After the Ciompi Revolt (1378), some members of this guild were authorized to form a sub-guild called *Carte de medici, speziali, dipintori e merciai*. Botticelli became a member of this guild in 1499.

At the beginning of his career, Botticelli's education followed the path of many Renaissance artists. He was at school studying reading and writing and possibly the basics of Latin.⁷² It is evident that Botticelli was certainly cultivated. His works reflected the study of Dante, Livy, Ovid, St. Augustine, Alberti and Poliziano.⁷³ Many sources agree that Botticelli had a deep interest in Dante. Kenneth Clark stated that "there is no doubt that for at least twenty years, Botticelli was obsessed by the study of Dante."⁷⁴ Paintings like the *Primavera*, which

⁷⁰ Wackernagel (1981), 300.

⁷¹ Woods-Marsden (1998), 20.

⁷² Lightbown (1978), 17.

⁷³ Stapleford (1995), 400.

⁷⁴ Clark, as quoted in Marmor (2003), 199.

shows “a fusion of Ovidian metamorphosis, Platonic ascent, and Dantesque transcendence”⁷⁵ and the *Calumny of Apelles* (1494, Florence), which will be discussed in more detail later, indicate persuasively that Botticelli was a well-educated artist. Botticelli became dissatisfied with his schools often and his father, Mariano, frequently moved him from school to school. Under the influence of his brother, Antonio, a goldsmith, Botticelli was sent to a goldsmith workshop. During Botticelli’s youth, the prestige of goldsmith was beginning to be overshadowed by the humanist’s interest in architecture, sculpture, and painting. As a result, he was drawn to painting. According to Vasari, at first Botticelli studied drawing more closely, but then focused more on painting.⁷⁶ Lightbown suggests Botticelli was removed from school around 1460.⁷⁷ After abandoning his career as a goldsmith, Antonio started a new business to provide gold-leaf to painters and miniaturists. Antonio’s business most likely introduced Botticelli to the workshops of painting and miniatures.

Around 1461-2 Botticelli studied under Fra Filippo Lippi at his workshop, who was very well-liked by the Medici. Lightbown suggests that his father placed Botticelli with Lippi so that he could be more closely related to and possibly noticed by the Medici.⁷⁸ Scholars have concluded that the richness of references in his paintings determine that he must have been “shaped fundamentally by the hand of a learned ‘humanist adviser.’”⁷⁹ This “adviser” refers to Lorenzo il Magnifico, who ushered Botticelli into his intellectual environment of the late 15th century. Botticelli’s first public Florentine commission in 1470, two painted panels of the *Virtues* for the Mercanzia in Florence, gained the attention of not only the Medici, but also the

⁷⁵ Paul Barolsky, "Botticelli's "Primavera" and the Poetic Imagination of Italian Renaissance Art." *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics* 8, no. 2 (2000): 35, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20163796>.

⁷⁶ Vasari, as cited by Lightbown (1978), 17.

⁷⁷ Lightbown (1978), 17.

⁷⁸ Lightbown (1978), 18.

⁷⁹ Marmor (2003), 199.

public eye of Florence.⁸⁰ This commission was highly prestigious because the Mercanzia was the commercial court of Florence and its palazzo was adjacent to the Palazzo Vecchio⁸¹, therefore Botticelli could advertise his skills and promote himself as an artist publically. Tommaso Soderini, one of the most important Florentines at the time and a friend of Botticelli, introduced him to this project. It is possible, according to O'Malley, that this was a political move.⁸² O'Malley suggests that this was because of Botticelli's neighborhood, a neighborhood that included important Florentine men like Angelo Poliziano and Ser Nastagio Vespucci. His relationships with men of such high reputation contributed to his affiliation with the economic, political, and social worlds of Florence. Vespucci, a jurist and the notary to the Signoria and Arte del Cambio, and his family members were closely related to members of the Medici family and Soderini. It's likely that Vespucci and Soderini heard about the commission by working with Lorenzo and suggested that Botticelli contribute.⁸³ Therefore, if Botticelli did an impressive job, the Medici family were more likely to have a higher regard for both Soderini and the Vespucci.

After this commission, Botticelli became the Medici's painter of preference.⁸⁴ According to O'Malley, Lorenzo il Magnifico acted as Botticelli's "agent" and promoted Botticelli for public and private commissions.⁸⁵ Thus, Florentines craved paintings by Botticelli because the Medici endorsed him, therefore having a painting by Botticelli was considered prestigious and aligned them politically with that powerful family. The evidence of Medici-related commissions was clear. The Pucci commissioned the *Adoration of the Magi* (1473, National Gallery London),

⁸⁰ Michelle O'Malley, "Finding Fame: Painting and the Making of Careers in Renaissance Italy." *Renaissance Studies* 24, no. 1 (2010): 11, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24420085>.

⁸¹ O'Malley (2010), 13.

⁸² O'Malley (2010), 13.

⁸³ O'Malley (2010), 16.

⁸⁴ O'Malley (2010), 16.

⁸⁵ O'Malley (2010), 16.

which was a Medici subject⁸⁶, for the Operà of Palazzo Vecchio, a group controlled by Lorenzo. Botticelli also painted an *Adoration of the Magi* (1475, Uffizi Gallery) for Gasparre del Lama, the chief broker for the Arte del Cambio, that included the male members of the Medici family. He also painted a series of portraits of young men holding medals of Cosimo il Vecchio. In 1476, Giuliano de' Medici hired Botticelli to make a standard for a joust. Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco, the same patron for the *Divina Commedia* illustrations, commissioned the *Primavera*. Following the death of Giuliano de' Medici after the Pazzi Conspiracy, the Medici commissioned Botticelli to paint a posthumous portrait of Giuliano. Finally, the Signoria commissioned from Botticelli a *pittura infamante* of the Pazzi conspirators.⁸⁷ By having his work desired by a multitude of prominent families, Botticelli could “shape concepts of devotion and ideas of political strength in Florence.”⁸⁸

By 1478, Botticelli was both working for the Medici and the Florentine Signoria. Because the Medici and the Signoria were involved with the Florentine economy, Botticelli gained a series of patrons that were associated with banking. In 1480, Vespucci commissioned frescoed images of Saints Augustine and Jerome to the doors of the Ognissanti. One of the most important commissions for Botticelli, however, was the tondo of the *Virgin and Child* (1478, Museo Civico) for Benedetto Salutati. This commission established Botticelli's name outside of Florence and into Rome. The tondo was a gift for Cardinal Gonzaga, Salutati's client and neighbor.⁸⁹ Gonzaga's household was a meeting place for high-status members of the Vatican where they would discuss humanist topics. It was important for Botticelli's painting to be in this

⁸⁶ Through the artwork that the Medici commissioned, they often compared themselves to the Magi, who were distinguished and strong leaders that also bore gifts to Christ out of humbleness. For example, the *Chapel of the Magi* (1444) in the Palazzo Medici by Benozzo Gozzoli, or the *Adoration of the Magi* tondo (mid 15th c., Washington) by Fra Angelico and Filippo Lippi.

⁸⁷ O'Malley (2010), 17.

⁸⁸ O'Malley (2010), 18.

⁸⁹ O'Malley (2010), 18.

environment because not only was it becoming associated with humanist subject matters, but it was also being seen by prominent members of the Vatican. Clearly, Botticelli's reputation in Rome was recognized because three years later, in 1481 he was hired to paint the frescoes in the Sistine Chapel, a commission that "solidified reputation and ensured professional success."⁹⁰

Vasari, in his *Lives* stated that Botticelli created the illustrations of the *Divina Commedia* "wasting a great deal of time on it, and since he did no other work he brought infinite disorder to his life."⁹¹ Since the first set of illustrations was created for Cristoforo Landino's 1481 edition of the *Divina Commedia*, the same year that Botticelli was hired for the Sistine Chapel paintings, this statement by Vasari is evidently untrue. Additionally, Richard Stapleford suggested that Vasari invented the anecdote regarding a friend of Botticelli's that humiliated his interest in Dante because Botticelli was illiterate. Vasari stated in his *Lives*, "It is certainly true that I have that opinion of your soul, which is bestial, but you are the heretic because, even though you are illiterate [*senza lettere*], you discourse on Dante and take his name in vain."⁹² Stapleford proposed that Vasari invented these anecdotes because it was a better fit for Vasari's portrayal of Botticelli as a "foolish character."⁹³ Yet, it was at this point in his career that Botticelli was becoming extremely successful. Botticelli remained unmarried, which was a common career move for artists that wanted to dedicate their lives to their artwork. This monk-like undertaking of never marrying allowed Botticelli to have an "undistracted pursuit of his professional goals."⁹⁴

⁹⁰ O'Malley (2010), 11.

⁹¹ Vasari, as quoted in Stapleford (1995), 400.

⁹² Vasari, as quoted in Stapleford (1995), 400.

⁹³ Stapleford (1995), 401.

⁹⁴ The idea of marriage terrified Botticelli. Vincenzo Borghini's series of notes written in the 1540s about the history of art, titled *Anomino Magliabechiano*, cites an anecdote that Botticelli had a nightmare that he was to be married and walked the streets of Florence all night so to avoid going back to sleep and having the nightmare again. Wackernagel (1981), 353.

One can see Botticelli's rise in confidence and dedication to his craft with his self-portrait in the *Adoration of the Magi* from 1475 (fig. 1), included among members of the Medici. The subject of the three kings was very popular in Florence. On Epiphany, there was a city-wide march that incorporated members of the Campagnia de' Magi (which included important members of the Medici). The march would start at the Battistero di San Giovanni, which represented Jerusalem, and would finish at San Marco, which represented Bethlehem.⁹⁵ In this painting, Botticelli included members of the Medici as the Magi, rather than just spectators of the kings recognizing the divinity of the Christ child. Therefore, not only in his self-portrait did Botticelli associate himself with the Medici, but he also associated himself with the Magi so that he could become a part of the "religious narrative."⁹⁶ Self-portraiture was a massive advance for the rising intellect of the artist. It was "an art form designed specifically for the affirmation of the artist."⁹⁷ The use of a self-portrait in a painting was an independent choice by the artist because there is no evidence of a patron commissioning a self-portrait during this period.⁹⁸ Since humanists were focusing more on the self, self-portraiture was an artist's way of commenting on this discussion.

Botticelli's self-portrait in the *Adoration of the Magi*, with Guasparre del Lama as its patron, was created during the height of Botticelli's career. Del Lama was one of the members of the Florentine banking world that desired to be associated with the Medici, thus it was essential to have a painting by Botticelli. When looking at Botticelli's self-portrait, Botticelli exudes confidence. He is the only figure in the painting that stares directly at the viewer. His brown and yellow garment stands out from the red and blue garments of the other figures. His

⁹⁵ Woods-Marsden (1998), 48.

⁹⁶ Woods-Marsden (1998), 43.

⁹⁷ Woods-Marsden (1998), 1.

⁹⁸ Woods-Marsden (1998), 3.

placement is directly opposite of Giuliano de' Medici, yet he takes up more space than Giuliano, which was a bold move for Botticelli. Botticelli sports the same hair style as Giuliano, which suggests that he is culturally aligned with the family as well. The most strikingly confident gesture, however, is his body language. He stands up straight and his stance is resistant. Botticelli's glance is downward, which expresses a sense of superiority and knowledge that he was "confidently in control of his art." In this self-portrait, Botticelli demands attention.

An artist's education in the Renaissance evolved from consisting of the basics of the vernacular and arithmetic, to the studies of the liberal arts, which closely related to the education that higher class citizens received. In Florence, much of this education depended on the wealthy families that were able to fund and establish these artistic schools, like the Medici. Botticelli found himself in a perfect situation where not only was he able to surround himself with the wealthy families of Florence, but he was also exposed to their intellectual discussions that eventually inspired the subject and overall quality of his artwork. Botticelli must have understood that his position in Florentine society, and especially the Medici family, was significant. His self-portrait in the 1475 *Adoration of the Magi* visually situated him among the most powerful men in Florence and even Europe. Furthermore, the recognition of painting, architecture, and sculpture as liberal arts gave way to artists beginning to include artistic theory into the humanist discussions that were occurring in Florence. Through these discussions, the close relationship of poetry and painting became a main argument in the attempt to raise painting to a higher status in the field of liberal arts.

Chapter Three: Elevation of Painting as a Liberal Art

The illustrations of the *Divina Commedia* suggest that Botticelli had a deep understanding of the well-known intellectual subject matters that circulated throughout Florence during the 15th century. To prove this, it is important to discuss the literature of painting and painters that was circulating in the 15th century. In the first half of the 15th century, there is not a great deal of evidence showing that artists were involved in theoretical and intellectual topics.⁹⁹ In 1450, however, Ghiberti's *Commentaries* discussed the history of Italian art and theoretical principles. This was extremely important because both literature and art were worthy enough for scholarly writing. Ghiberti's text launched the popularity of various artists writing their own theoretical texts on art. One of the most important works that emerged from the new interest in art theory was Alberti's *De Pictura*. Alberti divides his work into three parts: rudiments, painting, and the painter. In Book III, Alberti focuses on the relationship between painting and poetry and encourages artists to become acquainted with the liberal arts, and more specifically poetry. The text is based on the structure of ancient rhetorical treatises and in this text, Alberti transformed the ancient ternary structure of a treatise, (*poesis*, *poema*, and *poeta*) into his own: rudiments, painting, and the painter.¹⁰⁰ By doing this, Alberti elevated artistic theory on painting and painters to the status of ancient literary rhetoric. Due to the similar characteristics that painting and poetry share, according to Alberti, both the artist and the artwork itself will benefit from a deep understanding of the "poets and orators and other men of letters."¹⁰¹

The relationship between painting and poetry was a well-known subject matter in the 15th century. A great majority of the literature was an attempt to raise painting to an equal status to

⁹⁹ Ames-Lewis (2000), 141.

¹⁰⁰ Rosand (1990), 62.

¹⁰¹ Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting and on Sculpture*, trans. Cecil Grayson. Edited by Cecil Grayson (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1972), 97.

that of poetry. Cennino Cennini's *Il Libro dell'Arte* opened with the proposition that painting "deserves to be enthroned next to theory, and to be crowned with poetry."¹⁰² The literature surrounding this topic focused mostly on the similar abilities of painters and poets. The established term for this concept, "ut pictura poesis," which means "as in painting, so in poetry," derives from Horace's *Arts poetica*, written in 19 BC. Overtime, poets and painters began to convey Horace's idea into their own text. First and foremost, *Purgatorio* Canto XI includes a comparison between the renowned Florentine painters, Giotto and Cimabue, and Guido Guinizelli and Guittone d'Arezzo. This passage was often used by art theorists to raise the status of painting to that of poetry in the realm of the liberal arts:¹⁰³

O empty glory of the powers of humans! How briefly green endures upon the peak – unless an age of dullness follows it. In painting Cimabue though he held the field, and now it's Giotto they acclaim – the former only keeps a shadowed frame. So did one Guido, from the other, wrest the glory of our tongue...¹⁰⁴

Petrarch, in his *Trionfo della fama* also expanded on this idea by stating that Homer was *il primo pintor delle memorie*.¹⁰⁵ Leonardo da Vinci's *Treatise on Painting* proclaims that "if you assert that painting is dumb poetry, then the painter may call poetry blind painting."¹⁰⁶

The evident connection between a painter and a poet can also be found through *ekphrasis*, which is a textual description of a visual artwork and a literary form that became widespread during late antiquity. *Ekphrasis* continued to be used throughout the medieval and Renaissance time periods. Dante used *ekphrasis* in *Purgatorio* X when he described the

¹⁰² Cennino Cennini, *Il Libro Dell'arte*, trans. Jr. Daniel V. Thompson (New York: Dover Publications, 1933), 1.

¹⁰³ Ames-Lewis (2000), 163.

¹⁰⁴ Dante, *Purgatorio* XI, 91-8; Dante/Mandelbaum (1982), 99.

¹⁰⁵ Ames-Lewis (2000), 164.

¹⁰⁶ Ames-Lewis (2000), 166.

incredibly realistic carvings on the inside of the gate to Purgatory. He stated that the carvings were so accurate that “not only Polycletus but even Nature, there, would feel defeated.”¹⁰⁷

Ekphrasis also functions in the reverse order – a painting based on a certain text.

According to David Rosand, the development of Western art is a cycle of these visual and textual recreations.¹⁰⁸ Botticelli’s illustrations of the *Divina Commedia* are a component to this cycle – a visual work of art based on a text that he read. Botticelli thus followed Alberti’s suggestions to be a well-read artist, while also applying current forms of representation like *ekphrasis* to his artwork. During the Renaissance, *ekphrasis* was being used so frequently that it was a component in the evolution of the style of art, according to David Rosand. In 1435, the first occurrence of *ekphrasis* shaping the “pictorial culture” of the Renaissance was Alberti’s *De Pictura*. In Book III, Alberti offers his own *ekphrasis* of the Calumny of Apelles, a painting that was commonly taken through the *ekphrasis* “cycle.” Alberti paraphrases Lucian’s description from his *De Calumniis* of the ancient painting by Apelles with the intention of demonstrating that painters must be familiar with this text to accurately portray something true to its nature or “historia.” He emphasizes this concept by stating, “if this ‘historia’ seizes the imagination when described in words, how much beauty and pleasure do you think it presented in the actual painting of that excellent artist?”¹⁰⁹

In 1494, while he was in the process of illustrating the canticles of the *Divina Commedia*, Botticelli created his own version of the *Calumny of Apelles* (fig. 2). This painting is “the earliest surviving painted reproduction of a classical description.”¹¹⁰ The way Botticelli gained information for this painting is representative of the increasing intellectual understanding of

¹⁰⁷ Dante, *Purgatorio* X, 32-33; Dante/Mandelbaum (1982), 89.

¹⁰⁸ Rosand (1990), 63.

¹⁰⁹ Alberti/Grayson (1972), 97.

¹¹⁰ Ames-Lewis (2000), 193.

artists in the fifteenth century. Botticelli worked from three separate texts, Alberti's paraphrase in *On Painting*, Guarino da Verona's 1408 Latin translation of Lucian's description, and possibly the original Greek version by Lucian. It is likely that Lucian's text was more influential for Botticelli than Alberti's because there were certain components of the painting that were mentioned in Lucian's text and not in Alberti's. For example, the setting of the painting matches the setting described in Lucian's painting, yet Alberti's description does not mention setting at all. Lucian mentions donkey ears while Alberti only mentions long ears. Additionally, it can be assumed that Botticelli referred to the original Greek text because, as stated in Lucian's text, he placed Calumny's torch in her left hand. Guarino, however, mistranslated this detail and placed the torch in her right hand, and Alberti, in his Italian translation, also made this mistake.¹¹¹ Therefore, Botticelli had the intellectual capacity to understand the Latin in Guarino's translation and possibly the Greek of the original.

Most important is that Botticelli created this painting for himself.¹¹² This concept of independent work was new to 15th century artists and was triggered by the attempt to raise the abilities of painters to that of poets in the sphere of liberal arts. Art theorists proved this by studying the similar abilities that both poets and painters shared. Two of these abilities, *mimesis* and *fantasia*, supported the idea of "ut pictura poesis"—*mimesis* refers to the imitation of nature and *fantasia* means the ability to portray creative imagination. This concept was introduced by Durandus in his *Rationale divinorum officiorum*.¹¹³ Dante mentioned the idea of *mimesis* in the *Inferno*, Canto XI when Virgil said that "nature follows... the Divine Intellect and Divine Art." Virgil instructed Dante that his art should "follow nature" so he may imitate God's creations,

¹¹¹ Lightbown (1978), 97.

¹¹² Lightbown (1978), 123.

¹¹³ Ames-Lewis (2000), 164.

referring to his art as “God’s grandchild.”¹¹⁴ Here, Dante instructed his readers that the way to create valuable art is to imitate, to the best of one’s abilities, God’s Divine Art. This concept of imitation translated very well with art theorists.

Cennino Cennini opened *Il libro dell’arte* with a statement that imagination (*fantasia*) and manual skill are necessary for a painter. Furthermore, he compared the skills of poets and painters: “the poet...is free to compose... according to his inclination. In the same way, the painter is given freedom to compose a figure, standing, seated, half-man, half-horse, as he pleases, according to his imagination.”¹¹⁵ Thus, both a painter and poet, if they simultaneously imitated nature and used their own creativity, would have the ability to create significant artwork.

Together, these two abilities, *mimesis* and *fantasia*, support the term *invenzione*, which is an artist’s ability to create his or her own artwork through an “artistic license.”¹¹⁶ By the end of the fifteenth century, most artists had the freedom to interpret a subject matter through their own “creative power”¹¹⁷ Due to *invenzione*, the image of an artist was beginning to change – they were no longer simply craftsmen, but they were innovators. Today, this portrayal of artists seems ordinary, but before the fifteenth century, artists were not given the artistic freedom that they have today. It was common for patrons to avoid giving artists complete freedom when painting important subject matters.¹¹⁸ For example, on September 15, 1502, Isabella d’Este wrote a letter to Francesco Malatesta regarding an agreement on a painting by Pietro Perugino for her *camerino*, the *Battle of Love and Chastity* (1503, Paris). In the letter, she asked for

¹¹⁴ Dante, *Inferno XI*, 99-100; Dante/Mandelbaum (1982), 99

¹¹⁵ Cennini/Thomas (1933), 2.

¹¹⁶ Ames-Lewis (2000), 177.

¹¹⁷ Martin Kemp, "From Mimesis to Fantasia: The Quattrocento Vocabulary of Creation, Inspiration and Genius in the Visual Arts." *Viator* 8 (1977): 355.

¹¹⁸ Kemp (1977), 358.

specific details on subject matter and even drew out some of the specific details herself in an illustration.¹¹⁹ A year later after the contract was signed, Isabella wrote in a letter that she was displeased that “Perugino is not following the scheme for our picture laid down in the drawing.” She described that he was depicting a nude Venus, instead of a clothed one, “just to show off the excellence of his art.”¹²⁰ The tension between artist and patron is evident here. This situation is representative of the tension of the changing status and liberties of the artist, and the lost liberties of the patron.

Painters were starting to be “perceived as possessors of innate talent.”¹²¹ Renaissance art theorists believed that for an artist to create a successful piece of artwork, it was required of the artist to have both the *arte* (skill) and the *ingegno* (innate talent). It was widely accepted that *ingegno* could not be taught.¹²² Thus, the illustrations of the *Divina Commedia* are a confident statement by Botticelli that he was aware of the shifting status of the artist and the equivalence of painting to poetry. The illustrations demonstrate “a history of art’s progression in Botticelli’s own century.”¹²³ Due to the emergence of literature of artistic theory, artists were beginning to gain more confidence in their skill. Their occupation was no longer seen as the work of a craftsman, but a work of a genius.

¹¹⁹ Ames-Lewis (2000), 182.

¹²⁰ D.S. Chambers, *Patrons and Artists in the Italian Renaissance* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1970,) 140.

¹²¹ Emma Barker, Nick Webb, and Kim Woods *The Changing Status of the Artist / Edited by Emma Barker, Nick Webb, and Kim Woods*. (New Haven: Yale University in association with The Open University, 1999), 57.

¹²² Barker, Webb, Woods (1999), 57.

¹²³ Barbara J. Watts, "Artistic Competition, Hubris, and Humility: Sandro Botticelli's Response to "Visibile Parlare"." *Dante Studies, with the Annual Report of the Dante Society*, no. 114 (1996): 50, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40166595>.

Chapter Four: The Illustrations

The illustrations of the *Divina Commedia* were well-known among Florentines after the time of their creation. In the anecdote from the *Anonimo Magliabechiano*, Botticelli “painted and worked with the stories of Dante on vellum, which was held to by a marvelous thing.”¹²⁴ These illustrations indicated a response to the shift of the equalization of poetry and painting in the artistic world and the rising intellectual status of the artist. Barbara J. Watts stated that Botticelli succeeded in the challenge to “make art function as allusively as poetry, while on a literal level, achieving verisimilitude that would make his figures speak.”¹²⁵ The illustrations demonstrated a deep understanding of Dante’s text and showed that Botticelli had an intellectual familiarity with the text, which was an unusual feat for any artist and even scholar of his day. In his illustrations, Botticelli presented the *Commedia* from a “painter’s perspective.”¹²⁶ The fact that a painter was allowed such a perspective and that this perspective was taken seriously by other intellectuals was a confirmation of the increasing intellectual status of artists from the late fifteenth century.

The illustrations include a large topography of the *Chart of Hell*, where Botticelli rendered each circle and pouch of the *Inferno* in great detail. Included in the set is also a drawing of Lucifer that occupies two sheets that are glued together. Eight-three of the drawings are in Berlin, and eight are in the Vatican. By the third quarter of the seventeenth century, the illustrations were already divided. The Vatican drawings belonged to the library of Queen Christina of Sweden, while the Berlin drawings were bound in Paris by Giovanni Claudio

¹²⁴ As quoted in Marmor (2003), 201.

¹²⁵ Watts (1996), 43.

¹²⁶ Watts (1996), 43.

Molini. Molini's family members were Florentine booksellers in 1803, and they brought them to Paris after moving from Florence.¹²⁷

Although Botticelli created the spectacular set of ninety-two illustrations, he was not the first to depict the *Commedia* visually. Botticelli would have seen artistic representations of the *Commedia* before, though usually in the form of illuminated manuscripts and not illustrations.¹²⁸ No other work was more illustrated in such a short period of time after its publication than the *Commedia*. There are about eight hundred manuscripts we know of to this day. It was once thought that the oldest codex in history was the Palatino 313 in Biblioteca Nazionale in Florence (Dante Poggiali), which was originally thought to be created around 1330s, yet recent research shows it was around 1355.¹²⁹ One of the oldest almost complete Trecento illuminated manuscript was the Ms. Egerton 943 (British Library, London), created in the first half of the century from Bologna. It included 244 miniatures (80 *Inferno* miniatures, 106 *Purgatorio* miniatures, and 58 *Paradiso* miniatures).

The *Commedia* was represented in three types of illuminated manuscripts. The first was only the initials at the beginning of the *cantica* were illuminated. The second style had each *cantica* begin with a fully decorated page. Finally, the third system was having each canto illustrated individually. There are about thirty known illustrations of the fourteenth and fifteenth century that have each canto illustrated.¹³⁰ This third system consisted of two variations: either as text miniatures, where the miniatures were painted in body color and then set in frames

¹²⁷ Lightbown (1978), 147.

¹²⁸ Lightbown (1978), 150.

¹²⁹ Hein-Th Schulze Altcapenberg, and Julia Schewski, *Sandro Botticelli: The Drawings for Dante's Divine Comedy* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2000), 312.

¹³⁰ Altcapenberg, Schewski (2000), 312.

imbedded into the text, or as border illustrations, which were unframed pen drawings in the margins that were usually lightly colored with body color or water color.¹³¹

Historiated initials of the first letter of each *cantica* were very popular during the Trecento and employed certain motifs for the three *cantiche*. For *Inferno*, it was common for the N, (*Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra via...*) to have an illustration of Dante asleep at his desk in the forest, sometimes before or after his encounters with the three beasts or Virgil. In *Purgatorio*, the P (*Per correr miglior acque alza le vele...*) often included Virgil and Dante sailing in a boat towards Purgatory. The L of *Paradiso* (*La gloria di colui che tutto move...*) had more flexibility, and usually included a bust-length figure of Christ giving a blessing, an illustration of Dante and Beatrice, the holy trinity, or a scene of the Coronation of the Virgin.¹³²

Most artists devoted their time to depicting only the *Inferno* and a few cantos of *Purgatorio* or *Paradiso*. The desire of the Renaissance rulers of the Quattrocento to fill their private libraries with impressive works initiated their eagerness to collect de luxe manuscripts of the *Commedia*. Therefore, there were more completed manuscripts created in the Quattrocento than in the Trecento. They were more elaborately decorated and often contained a motif depicting the allegorical representation of the seven liberal arts on the folio.¹³³ There are three quattrocento complete illustrations commissioned by prominent families, other than Botticelli's, that are worth noting.

First, in 1438-44, Alfonso V of Aragon, King of Naples, Sardinia and Sicily commissioned a manuscript of the *Commedia*, now known as the Ms. Yates Thompson 36 (British Library). This manuscript includes 115 miniatures with one or two illustrations per

¹³¹ Altcapenberg, Schewski (2000), 312.

¹³² Altcapenberg, Schewski (2000), 312.

¹³³ Altcapenberg, Schewski (2000), 313.

canto framed below the text. Each *cantica* begins with a historiated initial and the manuscript was of Sienese style. The *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* illustrations were most recently attributed to Nicola d'Ulisse and *Paradiso* was attributed to Giovanni di Paolo.¹³⁴ Second, the Duke of Milan c. 1440 commissioned a manuscript of the *Inferno* with commentary by Guiniforte Barzizza and miniatures by the Master of Vitae Imperatorum. The manuscript is now divided between the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris (Ms. it. 2017: 381 folios with 59 miniatures) and the Biblioteca Comunale in Imola (Ms. 76: 21 folios with 13 miniatures). In this manuscript, each canto includes an illustration of three miniatures that represents each episode in the canto. Finally, the Dante Urbinate (Ms. Urb. Lat. 365), made for Federico da Montefeltro, the Duke of Urbino, contained *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* illustrations by Guglielmo Giraldi of Ferrara around 1478-1482. The *Paradiso* illustrations were added in the seventeenth century. The manuscript now resides in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana.¹³⁵ The manuscript has one miniature per canto, while each *cantica* has a lavishly decorated first page with an introductory miniature that includes three illuminated medallions in adorned frames.

Out of these Quattrocento manuscripts, Botticelli's includes the most illustrated episodes. Additionally, Virgil and Dante appear most frequently in Botticelli's illustrations. Botticelli uses the Sienese method of continuous narrative, by having Virgil and Dante appear more than once in each episode. He does, however, use continuous narrative most accurately out of all the quattrocento manuscripts listed above.¹³⁶

Florentine artwork also influenced Botticelli in his rendering of *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso*. Nardo di Cione's 1357 fresco from the Strozzi Chapel in Santa Maria Novella that

¹³⁴ Altcapenberg, Schewski (2000), 313.

¹³⁵ Altcapenberg, Schewski (2000), 314.

¹³⁶ Altcapenberg, Schewski (2000), 314.

depicted the scheme of *Inferno* according to Dante's *Commedia* and probably influenced the rocky settings that Botticelli used in his illustrations for *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*. The painting of Dante in the Duomo of Florence by Domenico di Michelino from 1465 most likely influenced Botticelli's portrayal of Dante in his illustrations.¹³⁷ Michelino's painting, *La commedia illumina Firenze* (1465, Florence) depicts Dante in the foreground of the painting, with the city of Florence to his right, *Inferno* to his left, *Purgatorio* behind him, and *Paradiso* above him in the sky. The architecture of the gates of *Inferno* is similar in both Botticelli's and Michelino's depictions. Both include the jagged rocks of *Inferno* and the steep rocky ascent of *Purgatorio*. Both Michelino and Botticelli depict Dante in a long red garment and hat, and similarly shaped shoes. Furthermore, both Botticelli's Dante and Michelino's Dante feature a long nose and a pronounced chin. It is easiest to see how Botticelli based the facial features of Dante on Michelino's Dante in the *Paradiso* drawings. Botticelli was not only very well acquainted with the text, but was also familiar with the surrounding artwork that also demonstrated an interest in Dante and the *Commedia*.

The date of the illustrations is still debated by art historians. Many scholars have agreed that a large portion of the drawings date to the 1490s.¹³⁸ Some historians believe that the drawings date before 1480 and continued until Botticelli's death in 1510.¹³⁹ The most probable explanation is that Botticelli began the illustrations in the 1470s for the Florentine edition of the *Commedia* by Cristoforo Landino. For Botticelli, the commission to illustrate the *Commedia* for the 1481 edition sparked an interest in completing the entirety of the text independently. Botticelli most likely made the *Inferno* illustrations for the Landino edition in the spring of 1481.

¹³⁷ Lightbown (1978), 150.

¹³⁸ Early twentieth century scholars Herbert Horne and Bernard Berenson were the first to propose this date, Altcapenberg (2000), 30.

¹³⁹ This date was first by Friedrich Lippmann. Altcapenberg (2000), 30.

A probable reason that the *Inferno* illustrations were incomplete for the Landino edition was probably due to his commission to paint the Sistine Chapel, thus prompting his departure to Rome. Most scholars agree that the *Chart of Hell* was completed after the *Inferno* drawings.¹⁴⁰ The early drawings from *Purgatorio* were probably completed in the early 1490s because there was no significant style change from the *Inferno* drawings. The *Paradiso* illustrations were possibly drawn around 1495 due to their larger and more elongated figures that bore a resemblance to the angels from Botticelli's *Mystic Nativity* (1500, London, National Gallery).¹⁴¹

The illustrations and text were on separate pages, which infers that Botticelli felt that both his illustrations and Dante's text shared equal weight.¹⁴² The text was written afterwards, therefore the drawings had the ability to hold a great amount of significance on their own. Lightbown suggests that the text was written afterwards because most of the *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* illustrations are numbered and some have an inscription of the first line of the canto on the drawing. *Paradiso* XXV is incorrectly numbered as 24, and this succession of numbering one short continues through *Paradiso* XXVI-XXXII. Lightbown states that, "it seems the drawings were begun first, and that at a certain stage, perhaps feeling himself to be more advanced than he was, Botticelli procured a full complement of sheets and had the text written out in full, resuming drawings after the scribe had finished."¹⁴³

The drawings were on the smooth side of the parchment and the text was organized into six columns and written on the rough side. The work was meant to be read horizontally and opened upwards with the drawing at the top and its corresponding canto on the bottom page.

¹⁴⁰ Altcapenberg, *Sandro Botticelli: The Drawings for Dante's Divine Comedy* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2000), 30.

¹⁴¹ Lightbown (1978), 149.

¹⁴² Watts (1996), 43.

¹⁴³ Lightbown (1978), 148.

The work began with the *Chart of Hell* drawn on the recto of the first page and then the first illustration of Canto I of *Inferno* was on its verso side. The illustrations were begun by repetitive contemplation of sketches, which can be inferred by the erasure marks that adorn most of the illustrations. Then, the final motif was outlined with pen when finished. Most of the illustrations were not fully colored (despite a few, for example, *Inferno* XVIII (fig. 3)), but it was Botticelli's intention that they would be colored entirely upon their completion, thus transforming them into an even grander masterpiece than they are today. This lengthy process indicated that Botticelli spent a great amount of independent time on the illustrations and therefore cared deeply about the project. Vasari, in his *Lives*, stated that Botticelli wasted a great deal of time on the illustrations, but this is untrue.¹⁴⁴ As stated in an earlier chapter, Botticelli was working on the illustrations during a significantly successful point in his career.¹⁴⁵ For that reason, Botticelli clearly felt that he was well-educated and successful enough to tackle an entirely visual translation of a text in which Florentines were basing a large majority of their ideologies.

Like many of the illuminated manuscripts that he would have seen, Botticelli used continuous narrative throughout his illustrations.¹⁴⁶ For example, a 1370 illuminated manuscript from Naples (1370, British Library, London) that depicts *Inferno* XVII has Dante and Virgil appear three times on the illustration. Botticelli employed this in almost every illustration of *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*, and Virgil and Dante appeared multiple times on one page, which emphasized their long and rigorous descent or ascent through Hell or Purgatory. With this

¹⁴⁴ Vasari, *Lives*, quoted in Stapleford (1995), 400. "In order to be a sophisticated person he did a commentary on Dante and drew and engraved the *Inferno*, wasting a great deal of time on it, and since he did no other work he brought infinite disorder to his life."

¹⁴⁵ Stapleford (1995), 400.

¹⁴⁶ Lightbown (1978), 150.

method, he could depict the canto entirely, rather than simply choosing a certain scene or “arbitrary selection”¹⁴⁷ that contained little symbolic significance in regards to the entire canto or *cantica*. To avoid confusion and maintain organization, Botticelli often used architecture, certain figures, or elements of the earth to distinguish the path of Dante and Virgil. In the *Inferno* drawings, most prominently in cantos XXIV- XXIX, Botticelli used the jagged rock formation to outline the sequence of the narrative. In *Purgatorio* XV Botticelli used Dante’s reaction to the glaring sun as a means of leading the narrative of the canto’s episodes.

He also maintained the flow of the narrative by introducing the next canto into the illustration. For example, in *Inferno* XII, Botticelli included the tombs from the cemetery of *Inferno* IX-XI at the top of the illustration, and the trees from *Inferno* XIII at the bottom of the illustration, which indicates that the narrative leads from the top of the illustration to the bottom. Combining cantos into a single illustration was extraordinarily innovative for the time. Continuous narrative also conveyed symbolism throughout the three *cantiche*. The use of continuous narrative and the overlapping of cantos decreased throughout the illustrations, which suggested an increase in the speed of Dante’s journey. The *Inferno* illustrations used these methods the most, which emphasized Dante’s strenuous path and the painful eternity of the sinners he encountered. In *Purgatorio*, continuous narrative was less prevalent and the illustrations became more united. Finally, by *Paradiso*, the use of continuous narrative was almost completely gone, which demonstrated the eagerness of the souls to reach God and the acceleration of Dante’s journey.¹⁴⁸

One of the most impressive characteristics of the illustrations was that they follow the same changes in tone of Dante’s three *cantiche*. Following Dante’s *Inferno* more literally,

¹⁴⁷ Altcapenberg (2000), 30.

¹⁴⁸ Altcapenberg (2000), 31.

Botticelli's *Inferno* illustrations were the most detailed of the three canticles. Botticelli was able to use Virgil's description of Hell in Canto XI as a basis for the setting of his illustrations. The extremely clear setting in these illustrations related well to an important concept in *Inferno*—the power of sight. Throughout Dante's journey through Hell, it was imperative that he began his journey with a path of descent so that he could visually and audibly experience the consequences of living a life of sin. This point was made clear when Dante asked Virgil for his assistance against the beast that blocked his path. Virgil, however, suggested that there is another path for Dante. In this section of the canto, Dante utilized words related to sight and auditory perception. For example, Virgil stated "you shall hear the howls of desperation and see the ancient spirits in their pain, as each of them laments his second death; and you shall see those souls who are content within the fire..."¹⁴⁹ Thus, Botticelli understood the text well enough to know that it was crucial to use precise detail as a continuous theme throughout the *Inferno* drawings to express this concept.

Botticelli followed *Purgatorio* more loosely, which suited the rather mystifying atmosphere of Dante's *Purgatorio*. The earlier cantos of *Purgatorio* were partially sketched with inconsistent indications of setting. Again, Botticelli used setting to express Dante's experience through Purgatory. Dante often experienced dreams that disoriented his sense of reality. For example, in Canto IX, Dante compared his confusing awakening from the dream of the Eagle to Achilles's own awakening. Achilles's mother stole him from his sleep and therefore he lost his sense of setting when he awoke. After Dante's own awakening, he described himself as "pale, as will a man who, terrified, turns cold as ice."¹⁵⁰ In order to depict the disarray of Dante's awakening, the narrative distinction between Dante's dream and Dante's reality was more

¹⁴⁹ Dante, *Inferno I*, 113-118; Dante/Mandelbaum (1982), 9.

¹⁵⁰ Dante, *Purgatorio IX*, 41-42; Dante/Mandelbaum (1982), 79.

unclear. The rocks that usually organized the narrative of each illustrations were more faded in the illustration. Botticelli understood, however, that despite Dante's own confusion, the illustration needed to be comprehensible for the viewer. Therefore, Botticelli used the faded rocks as a diagonal division from the top left corner to the bottom right corner to establish Dante's fantasy and his reality. The later cantos of *Purgatorio*, however, were illustrated with more detail, possibly due to the intricacy of the cantos' subject matter.¹⁵¹

The *Paradiso* illustrations were drastically different than the illustrations of *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*. *Paradiso*, possibly one of the most challenging of the *cantiche* to understand, does not easily lend itself to visual representations. In a realm where time, space, and "all sense of physical comparison is lost,"¹⁵² Botticelli managed to express Dante's message of sheer holiness, love, and light in his illustrations by embracing its simplicity; as did Dante, who conveyed that the beauty of Paradise was so outstanding that he could not express it into words. Most of the illustrations included only Dante and Beatrice in the respective sphere of the canto. The figures were more than twice the size of figures from *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* and seemed weightless as they move from one sphere to the next. Ronald Lightbown suggested that many of the illustrations remained mostly undecorated to highlight the importance of the "exalted spiritual and theological content of the speeches."¹⁵³ The use of Botticelli's simplistic rendering of *Paradiso* is proof that he understood the magnitude of this *cantica* compared to the others.

Most importantly, these illustrations of the *Divina Commedia* were not simply an exact visual mirroring of the text. They were a product of Botticelli's intellect and his expression of confidence as an artist who could accurately portray an extremely dense and complicated series

¹⁵¹ Lightbown (1978), 149.

¹⁵² Lightbown (1978), 149.

¹⁵³ Lightbown (1978), 150.

of texts with an independent style. Botticelli was part of an era where the artist was beginning to have an educated voice. Each artistic choice Botticelli made was deliberate and a method of artistic translation and commentary. To expand on this, I chose six illustrations to elaborate on in more detail.

Illustrations

Purgatorio X (fig. 4)

This canto gave Botticelli an opportunity to demonstrate that the skills of poetry and painting could exist on the same level. The canto presents itself with a unique challenge of depicting two types of realities: stone and flesh. The success of Botticelli's visual translation would not have been possible or fully recognized without the developments of artistic theory in the liberal arts. The illustration recalls David Rosand's idea of the *ekphrasis* "cycle"—the canto itself is a series of *ekphrases* written by Dante, and Botticelli's illustration is an *ekphrasis* of the Dante's *ekphrases*. The canto begins with Dante and Virgil ascending into the first terrace of the Proudful on rocks that "seemed to sway in one, then the other part, just like a wave that feels, then doubles back."¹⁵⁴ Botticelli visualizes this by having Dante and Virgil emerge from the bottom of the page through a jagged and narrow ascent. Afterwards, Dante offers a series of three *ekphrases* as examples of humility in the form of reliefs: The Annunciation from the Gospels, David Dancing Before the Ark from the Old Testament, and the Justice of Trajan. The continuous narrative leads from left to right, which is ushered by Virgil's guiding hand gestures. These reliefs that are situated after the gates of Purgatory are God's divine creations. Dante uses visual sensations as proof for the supernatural and divine creativity that the sculptures

¹⁵⁴ Dante, *Purgatorio X*, 7-9; Dante/Mandelbaum (1982), 87.

exemplify.¹⁵⁵ The image of the Annunciation is so realistic that Dante swears he can hear Mary speaking “*Ecce ancilla Dei*” and compares the figures being so lifelike that they seem “stamped in wax.” Next, indicated in both the text and the illustration, we see Virgil directing Dante to the other sculptures. The sculpture of David dancing before the ark seems so believable that Dante can hear the choirs singing. Botticelli includes the dead body of Uzzah, a detail that is not mentioned in the text¹⁵⁶, which illustrates Botticelli’s awareness of the story’s background information. Finally, the Justice of Trajan that seems to be “moving in the wind,” is the last of the three examples of humility. At the end of the canto, Dante and Virgil see the sinners that purge their prideful sins by carrying stones on their back. The sinners struggle so much that Dante states they do not “appear to me like people.” Textually, this is an extraordinary contrast between the lifelike sculptures made of stone and the once-human souls that look anything but human to Dante.

Clearly, the canto is rich with narration and detail, so therefore it would seem to lend itself well to visual representation. Yet, Dante presents Botticelli with a challenge: attempting to depict two convincingly different realities of stone and flesh.¹⁵⁷ Dante describes the side of the mountain of Purgatory “adorned with carvings so accurate – not only Polycletus but even Nature, there, would feel defeated.”¹⁵⁸ Botticelli succeeds in this challenge by using linear perspective and architectural frames to separate the two types of realities. Simultaneously, Botticelli uses the architectural frames to acknowledge the skill and innovation of contemporary artists. The way in which Dante and Virgil view the three scenes is very much like a museum exhibition.¹⁵⁹ Each of

¹⁵⁵ Altcapenberg (2000), 156.

¹⁵⁶ Watts (1996), 50.

¹⁵⁷ Watts (1996), 44.

¹⁵⁸ Dante, *Purgatorio X*, 31-33; Dante/Mandelbaum (1982), 89.

¹⁵⁹ Altcapenberg (2000), 156.

the three examples of humility are placed within their own architectural space, therefore they are separated from Dante and Virgil. These architectural frames are not mentioned in the text; therefore, they are a product of Botticelli's *invenzione*. The scene of the Annunciation uses Brunelleschian architecture behind the figures of Gabriel and Mary. Although hardly visible, the loggia evokes architectural achievements used in paintings by Botticelli's predecessors like Fra Angelico and his own teacher Fra Filippo Lippi. Behind "David Dancing Before the Ark," is a Quattrocento palazzo with designs inspired by Donato Bramante and Giuliano da Sangallo. Additionally, Botticelli acknowledges the current *paragone* between sculpture and painting that was occurring in the theoretical artistic discussions by including decorative reliefs on the palazzo. Finally, the Justice of Trajan is the most separated of the three examples. In its own frame, the scene of Trajan is further divided by the two sinners that Botticelli places in front of the relief at the bottom, who appear less human than any other figure in the illustration. The crowded atmosphere of the relief distracts both Virgil and Dante from the struggling penitents. Their gaze is focused only on the relief, while the sinners focus only on Dante and Virgil. The organization of the Justice of Trajan clearly pays tribute to Paolo Uccello's *Battle of San Romano* (1438, Uffizi Gallery), which is ultimately a nod towards the Medici, the patrons of the painting.¹⁶⁰

The use of linear perspective is very unusual in this series of illustrations because most of Botticelli's illustrations use rising perspective. It is surprising that Botticelli rarely uses linear perspective in his illustrations due to its rising popularity in the fifteenth century. Therefore, the application of linear perspective in this case is deliberate. Barbara J. Watts states that the use of linear perspective is suitable for this canto because the reliefs are "examples of humility that,

¹⁶⁰ Watts (1996), 50.

themselves, bespeak the straight line and clear vision of the moral and spiritual eye.”¹⁶¹

Botticelli uses linear perspective to demonstrate an “accurate rendering of God’s reliefs.”¹⁶²

Therefore, when viewing Botticelli’s illustrations in their entirety, this illustration stands out from the rest as the most realistic. Most impressively, Botticelli exhibits his skill as an artist one step further by using linear perspective as a symbolic method rather than simply an illusionistic method. He demonstrates his familiarity with the text and the inclusion of linear perspective to reveal the intense reality that Dante experiences on the first terrace of Purgatory. As discussed in an earlier chapter, it was common for fifteenth century commentators to relate the *Commedia* to their own political, social, or intellectual situations. In this illustration, Botticelli also acts as a commentator by providing his own artistic commentary through the representation of newfound artistic methods like linear perspective while also illuminating the individual characteristics of contemporary artists. Through this illustration, Botticelli comments on the importance of *invenzione* in the artistic world of the fifteenth century, while simultaneously demonstrating his own intelligence as an artist and as a Dante scholar/reader.

Purgatorio XV (fig. 5)

This canto takes place on the second circle in the third terrace, the ascent towards the Wrathful. It is mid-afternoon at this point in the poets’ journey, as explained in first few tercets of the canto. Unlike most of the cantos in *Purgatorio* and *Inferno*, this canto offers little visual description that can be rendered by an illustrator. The canto has “no vivid images to inspire *mimesis*,” but only contains the description of the intense light of the sun and its symbolism, the guidance of the angel, Virgil’s philosophical discussion of the difference between worldly goods

¹⁶¹ Watts (1996), 48.

¹⁶² Watts (1996), 47.

and divine goods, and Dante's three visions of examples of meekness: The Virgin Mary, the wife of Pisistratus and Pisistratus's response, and St. Stephen. In this canto, Botticelli, like Dante, focuses less on physical representation of the details of the canto and focuses more on the symbolism through the figures' gestures and poses.

The narration begins at the lower right hand corner of the illustration and follows towards the middle of the illustration, which is guided by Virgil's gesture and mimicked by the angel that leads the poets up the path to the end of the narration, which finishes with Dante asleep on the next terrace. Although the sun is not pictured in the illustration, we see Dante's increasing struggle with its intense brightness. Botticelli begins the illustration with Dante hovering his hand over his brow "to limit some of that excessive splendor."¹⁶³ Next, Dante covers his eyes with his hand, but still faces his head towards the direction of the light. Finally, when Dante follows Virgil up the less steep steps, Dante points his head down completely, "struck there by light reflected, facing me, at which my eyes turned elsewhere rapidly."¹⁶⁴ Virgil, too, faces away from the light in every moment of the illustration, which reminds the viewer that Virgil's place is in Hell in Limbo, and not in Purgatory or Paradise because he was born before Christ. In the poets' ascent up the stairs Botticelli illustrates Dante holding on to Virgil's back as a guide up the steps. This physical contact between Virgil and Dante could be Botticelli's visual translation of Virgil's reassurance to Dante that the light will be of "no difficulty for you, but delight—as much as nature fashioned you to feel."¹⁶⁵ Additionally, Virgil's guiding hand up the stairs might symbolize his philosophical discourse to Dante on earthly and worldly goods.

¹⁶³ Dante, *Purgatorio XV*, 15-16; Dante/Mandelbaum (1982), 135.

¹⁶⁴ Dante, *Purgatorio XV*, 23-24; Dante/Mandelbaum (1982), 135.

¹⁶⁵ Dante, *Purgatorio XV*, 32-33; Dante/Mandelbaum (1982), 137.

Botticelli's depiction of the angel, however, indicates that it is a "personification of inner light"¹⁶⁶ because the angel is the only figure in the entire illustration that comfortably stares directly at the sun, since it issues the light to Dante and Virgil. Its garment too, illustrated with short strokes and "agitated outlines"¹⁶⁷ are more loose and translucent than the other figures', distinguishes the angel as a foreigner of Purgatory. The angel leads Virgil and Dante up the steps "less steep than were the other stairs."¹⁶⁸ Botticelli emphasizes the change in steepness by having the viewer observe the steps straight on, rather than from the side like in *Purgatorio X*.

Most important in this illustration is that Botticelli chooses not to visually represent Dante's three visions of meekness. This choice was not a mistake, but an example of his close attention to the way in which Dante describes the nature of his visions: "And when my soul returned outside itself and met the things outside it that are real, I then could recognize my not false errors."¹⁶⁹ Here, Dante uses the word "error" to describe his visions not to imply they are inaccurate, but to indicate that they are simply not real. Yet, they are also "not false" because these visions communicate divine truth. Thus, Botticelli decides to embody this concept in avoiding their visual representation altogether. In order to convey the visions' effect on Dante, Botticelli illustrates Dante lying down sleeping, rather than depicting him as walking unsteadily, which is mentioned in the text. Botticelli could have been inspired by Dante describing his stance as "a man who's freed himself from sleep"¹⁷⁰ or Virgil's pronouncement, "I did not ask 'What's wrong with you?'" as one who only sees with earthly eyes, which – once the body stripped of soul, lies dead – can't see."¹⁷¹ By depicting Dante as lying down, Botticelli creates

¹⁶⁶ Altcapenberg (2000), 170.

¹⁶⁷ Altcapenberg (2000), 170.

¹⁶⁸ Dante, *Purgatorio XV*, 36; Dante/Mandelbaum (1982), 137.

¹⁶⁹ Dante, *Purgatorio XV*, 115-117; Dante/Mandelbaum (1982), 141.

¹⁷⁰ Dante, *Purgatorio XV*, 119; Dante/Mandelbaum (1982), 141.

¹⁷¹ Dante, *Purgatorio XV*, 133-135; Dante/Mandelbaum (1982), 141.

an analogy between “Dante’s visionary state” and the state of the dead souls that Dante has encountered in his journey through *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* thus far.¹⁷² Botticelli emphasizes Dante’s sins that still remain¹⁷³ by demonstrating Dante’s “uninspired inertia”¹⁷⁴ of his pose. Dante’s pose contrasts Virgil’s agile posture, which further underlines Virgil as Dante’s connection to the angel.¹⁷⁵

Inferno XII (fig. 6)

This illustration demonstrates Botticelli’s close attention to detail with his use of precise continuous narrative. Canto XII takes place on the seventh circle in the first ring: those that were violent against their neighbors. We see Botticelli’s use of continuous narrative with his inclusion of the tombs from the cemetery of *Inferno IX-XI* at the top of the illustration, and the trees of the sinners who were violent against themselves in the following canto at the bottom of the illustration. In this way, Botticelli demonstrates the narrative descent of *Inferno XII* by framing the illustration with its preceding and successive cantos. The path of Dante and Virgil is outlined by the giant rock formation that takes up two thirds of the composition. Botticelli portrays the “toppled mass of rock”¹⁷⁶ as unstable by having the rocks unevenly lay on top of one another, which emphasizes Dante’s feeling of unsteadiness; “that heap of stones, which often moved beneath my feet because my weight was somewhat strange for them.”¹⁷⁷ The remaining third of the illustration is framed by the curved river of boiling blood, later identified as the Phlegethon.

¹⁷² Altcapenberg (2000), 170.

¹⁷³ Dante still has five *P*’s inscribed on his forehead.

¹⁷⁴ Altcapenberg (2000), 170.

¹⁷⁵ Altcapenberg (2000), 170.

¹⁷⁶ Dante, *Inferno XII*, 4; Dante/Mandelbaum (1982), 105.

¹⁷⁷ Dante, *Inferno XII*, 28-30; Dante/Mandelbaum (1982), 105.

The narrative begins at the right corner and follows diagonally across the illustration to the bottom left, which follows the various figures that Dante and Virgil encounter.

The first encounter is with the Minotaur. At the top right corner of the illustration, the Minotaur cowers beneath Dante and Virgil, biting himself in anger. Unlike the traditional mythological rendering, Botticelli portrays the Minotaur with the body of a bull and head of a human. Earlier illustrators depicted the Minotaur in this way, and this specific alteration in depiction of ancient creatures demonstrates Botticelli's close study of the *Inferno*, "which is founded on the principle of inverting both the visible reality and habitual preconceptions."¹⁷⁸ Following this encounter, Virgil commands Dante to "run toward the pass; it's better to descend while he's berserk."¹⁷⁹ Botticelli portrays Dante's hurriedness by having his garment waving behind him.

The next encounter is with Nessus, the centaur responsible for the death of Hercules. When Dante and Virgil meet Nessus, he is defensive and states that if the two poets move any closer, he will draw his bow. At this point, Virgil establishes an offensive tone by stating, "We shall make reply only to Chiron, when we reach his side; your hasty will has never served you well."¹⁸⁰ Botticelli distinguishes Nessus's defensive nature and Virgil's offensive tone by creating a large space between the two. In an urgent attempt to stop Nessus from drawing his bow, Virgil holds out his arm and hand into the large space. In this way, Botticelli breaks up the rhythm of the narrative and establishes a clear moment of suspense. He further establishes the mood of this encounter by having the centaurs hunting before and after this scene, creating a

¹⁷⁸ Altcapenberg (2000), 64.

¹⁷⁹ Dante, *Inferno XII*, 26-27; Dante/Mandelbaum (1982), 105.

¹⁸⁰ Dante, *Inferno XII*, 64-66; Dante/Mandelbaum (1982), 107.

“undulating rhythm of scenes,”¹⁸¹ which makes the encounter the focal point in the entire illustration.

Furthermore, Botticelli focuses his attention on Dante’s description of the nature of the boiling river of blood. In the text, Dante mentions that the river “continually thins” throughout their journey. At first, the souls are up to their brows in the river, then their necks, and finally the river is shallow enough that only the souls’ feet are scorched. Botticelli represents the river at its deepest on the bottom right of the illustration where only the heads of the souls are visible. In the middle of the river, Botticelli follows Dante’s text literally by depicting the souls that “kept their heads and even their full chests above the tide.”¹⁸² Finally, at the bottom left of the illustration, and the shallowest part of the river, the souls clench their heads in agony due to their scorched feet. The way in which Dante describes the river lends itself well to visual representation. Botticelli’s rendering of the “many thousands [that] wheel around the moat”¹⁸³ demonstrates the permanence of the souls’ residence and their eternal submersion in the boiling river.

Inferno XX (fig. 7)

In *Inferno*, Botticelli recognizes the importance of sight as a principal motif in the canticle. His acknowledgment of this motif is evident in Canto XX. In this canto, Dante and Virgil arrive at the fourth pouch in the eighth circle where the Diviners, Astrologers, and Magicians suffer with their heads backwards, thus they suffer distorted sight as well. The punishment prohibits the sinners from seeing ahead because they were damned for attempting to

¹⁸¹ Altcapenberg (2000), 64.

¹⁸² Dante, *Inferno XII*, 121-122; Dante/Mandelbaum (1982), 111.

¹⁸³ Dante, *Inferno XII*, 73; Dante/Mandelbaum (1982), 109.

see too far into the future. Depicted in the illustration, taken directly from the text, Dante and Virgil are first seen at the top right of the illustration staring “down below, into the depth that was disclosed”¹⁸⁴ into the circle of sinners. Botticelli frames the illustration with jagged rocks that encircle the clustered bodies of the misshapen sinners. In this canto, Botticelli uses an impressive innovation of “dual perspective”¹⁸⁵ to convey the equal abilities of poetry and illustration, while also using this type of perspective to underline the distortion of the sinners. Per usual, he uses continuous narrative to organize the plot by having Dante and Virgil descend to the bottom left of the illustration. At the beginning, Dante and Virgil view the scene from above, while the viewer observes the scene from the other side, parallel to the picture plane.¹⁸⁶ Botticelli wants the viewer to read the illustration in successive steps, like how we read a story, rather than simply digesting the illustration as one piece. In this case, however, Botticelli adds another layer of narrative by using a combination of objective and subjective viewpoints in Dante’s perspective. Dante’s perspective is subjective and it “shifts according to the locality depicted,” therefore the viewer is required to constantly refocus his or her eyes to accurately scan the illustration.¹⁸⁷ This combination of viewpoints requires Botticelli to continuously readjust the illustration’s proportions and scale, which is a very difficult and time-consuming process. As stated in Altcapenberg, by using dual perspective, the viewer follows the illustration “like a map, all parts equal size and repeated figures occupying more or less the same amount of space.”¹⁸⁸ The inclusion of the dual perspective is an attempt by Botticelli to demand the viewer to study the illustration with a deeper analysis, therefore this is an indication that Botticelli

¹⁸⁴ Dante, *Inferno XX*, 4-5; Dante/Mandelbaum (1982), 179.

¹⁸⁵ Altcapenberg (2000), 90.

¹⁸⁶ Altcapenberg (2000), 90.

¹⁸⁷ Altcapenberg (2000), 90.

¹⁸⁸ Altcapenberg (2000), 90.

believes that his illustration deserves the same amount of interpretation as the text. At the same time, Botticelli demonstrates that his illustration can articulate the story with consecutive narrative steps in the same way that the poetry can.

Botticelli also uses dual perspective to establish the pace of the canto. Dante notes that he sees the souls “advancing, mute and weeping, at the pace that, in our world, holy processions take place.”¹⁸⁹ When the viewer must switch between two different viewpoints, the change in narrative pace is evidently slower. Botticelli forces the viewer to slowly scan the scene which emphasizes the sinners’ sluggish pace. Therefore, Botticelli uses his device of dual perspective to not only direct the way in which to read the illustration, but also to determine the pace of how to read it. The result of dual perspective is similar to the intense narrative immersion that a reader gains when reading the text itself; with the alternation between viewpoints, the viewer unconsciously places him or herself in the dense crowd of torpid souls that walk blindly into the jagged rocks that outline the illustration. In this way, Botticelli succeeds at equalizing the narrative effects of literature and illustration. Finally, the use of dual perspective symbolizes the punishment of the sinners. Because Botticelli forces the viewer to oscillate between viewpoints, there is an emphasis on the contrast between the backward position of the sinners’ heads and the forward position of Dante’s head. When the viewer is forced to switch between objective and subjective viewpoints, it creates the illusion of switching between the sinners’ perspectives and Dante’s perspective.

Paradiso XXVIII (fig. 8)

¹⁸⁹ Dante, *Inferno* XX, 8-9; Dante/Mandelbaum (1982), 179.

In this canto, Beatrice and Dante arrive at the Primum Mobile and Dante sees the hierarchal structure of the Angelic Intelligences. It is in this moment that the true form of the inhabitants of Paradise are revealed to Dante. The embodiment of Botticelli's illustration can be seen in line 87 of the canto: *il ver si vede*, or "the truth was seen."¹⁹⁰ In all previous cantos of *Paradiso*, Botticelli illustrates the inhabitants of Paradise as little flames that are covered by God's light. In an astounding contrast from *Paradiso* XXVI (fig. 9), which consists of the same layout of *Paradiso* XXVIII, the only difference being the angels are still concealed by God's light, Botticelli creates the dramatic reveal that Dante experiences in his encounter with the visual truth of the Angelic Intelligences. To further emphasize *il ver si vede*, Botticelli has Dante cover his eyes in Canto XXVI, while in Canto XXVIII, he lifts his hand off his eyes and gazes at the "fixed Point which holds and always shall hold them to where they have forever been."¹⁹¹ In the angels' true form, Dante describes them as "rings of fire," yet Botticelli brings his own artistic rendition to Dante's description. He combines Beatrice's description of the complexities of the spheres of Paradise, "li cerchi corporai" (the bodily rings), with the central idea of *Paradiso* that the angelic intelligences are "immortal creatures who eternally gaze upon God."¹⁹²

The complexities of this canto must have been extremely difficult for Botticelli not only to understand, but to illustrate. In *Paradiso* XXVIII, we learn about the hierarchy of the Angelic Intelligences through Beatrice. The hierarchy consists of three groups of three in accordance with the angels' degree of blessedness: Seraphim, Cherubim, Thrones; Dominions, Virtues, Powers; Principalities, Archangels, and Angels (this order was given by Dionysus of Areopagite). Those closest to the fixed point burn with the purest flame. Dante is confused,

¹⁹⁰ Dante Alighieri, *Paradiso*, trans. by Allen Mandelbaum (New York: Bantam Dell, 1982), *XXVIII*, ln. 87, 257.

¹⁹¹ Dante, *Paradiso XXVIII*, 95-97; Dante/Mandelbaum (1982), 257.

¹⁹² Altcapenberg (2000), 277.

however, because this does not follow the scheme of his own world. Dante learns that in this space, physical size does not matter, but the degree of blessedness holds the power. Beatrice explains that the innermost sphere consists of the most intelligent and powerful beings, despite it being the smallest ring. We see Dante's puzzlement in his facial expression, Botticelli illustrates him with open lips to represent his astonishment.

At the top of the illustration, we can see the preliminary sketches of the illustration, which demonstrates the geometrical method that assisted the specific perspective of the illustration. Botticelli considered the fixed point of light, which is at the top center of the illustration, as the central point of the illustration. The angels all gaze in the same direction towards God's light, guided by Beatrice's hand and arm pointing directly upwards to that point. In this way, Botticelli enhances the movement of the angels by the angle in which they are situated. To assist this, Botticelli has Beatrice and Dante separate the illustration vertically. Those to the left of Beatrice and Dante have their gaze in line with their bodies, while those to the right of Beatrice and Dante must turn their heads to the left in order to maintain their gaze on the fixed point. This demonstrates their constant circular movement. Botticelli organizes and distinguishes each Angelic Intelligence by adorning them with different uniforms, which also helps to establish their speed. For example, the angels who inhabit the furthest ring from the center have garments that only seem to lightly sway by their feet. In comparison, the waving flags of the inhabitants of the sixth circle from the outside indicate their more vigorous pace than the angels of the outermost circle.

Most importantly in this illustration is the *cartellino* of an angel in the outermost circle that bears Botticelli's signature. The purpose of his signature was a "self-referential reminder, a

petition on behalf of himself and his work.”¹⁹³ Botticelli places his name in the “very sphere where Dante is to see God directly for the first time and where, according to the following canto, memory is no longer necessary.”¹⁹⁴ This action is perhaps even more of a statement of confidence than his self-portrait in the 1475 *Adoration of the Magi*. In this illustration, Botticelli acknowledges his artwork and intelligence in the presence of God, and believes that his work is something that should never leave one’s memory, thus suggesting his talent as eternal.

Paradiso XXX (fig. 10)

Canto XXX of *Paradiso* is the last complete illustration in Botticelli’s entire rendering of the *Commedia*. In this canto, Dante finally reaches the Tenth Heaven in the Empyrean and can accurately see the “heaven of pure light, light of the intellect, light filled with love, love of true good, love filled with happiness, a happiness surpassing every sweetness.”¹⁹⁵ Through the process of seeing the Empyrean, Dante transcends from the physical universe to the spiritual world, a place that is still and lacks the concepts of space and time. How does Botticelli begin to depict a place so spectacular, while also portraying a place that goes beyond the physical boundaries of our own world? Dante himself acknowledges this challenge and addresses that all artists must accept defeat at some point (*come a l’ultimo suo cisascuno artista*).¹⁹⁶ In this canto, Botticelli illustrates only what happens to Dante before his eyes are bathed in the river and he is given additional grace. Botticelli does not include the image of the celestial rose and the circle of light that derives from a single ray from the light of God. This should not be considered careless of Botticelli to neglect the rest of the canto, but should be considered incredibly

¹⁹³ Altcapenberg (2000), 277.

¹⁹⁴ Altcapenberg (2000), 277.

¹⁹⁵ Dante, *Paradiso XXX*, 38-42; Dante/Mandelbaum (1982), 273.

¹⁹⁶ Dante, *Paradiso XXX*, 33; Dante/Mandelbaum (1982), 272.

intelligent. Botticelli understands that since the elements of the Empyrean are beyond our physical understanding, it would be nearly impossible to illustrate them. By neglecting the rest of the canto, Botticelli accepts his defeat as an artist, the same defeat that Dante mentions in the canto. For Botticelli, this exciting concept must have caused a dilemma, however, regarding the Renaissance rule of Alberti's *disegno*. Alberti's rule required that *disegno*, "must accurately depict the object on the basis of a clear understanding."¹⁹⁷ Here, Botticelli evolves the rule and develops his own method of *disegno*. He creates "spiritually charged, formal abstractions" to accept "allusive representation as an autonomous quantity."¹⁹⁸

The beginning of the canto still proves to be challenging. Botticelli must establish a difference between the earlier cantos of *Paradiso* because now Dante and Beatrice approach the Empyrean, therefore he must create an illustration that depicts the "last image of the *Divine Comedy* that is perceptible in time and space: the spiritual light."¹⁹⁹ Botticelli achieves this concept by utilizing the river of light to express delicacy, transparency, and speed in the narrative organization of the illustration. The river of light that leads to the Empyrean divides the illustration diagonally, leading our eyes from the bottom right corner to the top left. The diagonal river also leads the narration; the closer the story moves towards the Empyrean, the more "open and undefined" the illustration becomes,²⁰⁰ which indicates the artistic limitation that Botticelli and Dante acknowledge in the canto. Additionally, the composition of every figure in this illustration follows the angle of the diagonal river. Beatrice's arm flows parallel to the river, Dante's body faces towards the top left corner, and the angelic sparks in the form of flaming genii and the flowers that they pollinate flow in the same direction as the river. The diagonal

¹⁹⁷ Altcapenberg (2000), 282.

¹⁹⁸ Altcapenberg (2000), 282.

¹⁹⁹ Altcapenberg (2000), 282.

²⁰⁰ Altcapenberg (2000), 282.

division of the illustration also has the viewer feel the speed in which Dante and Beatrice travel to the Empyrean. Unlike *Inferno* XX, where the viewer can feel the sluggish movement of the souls, in this illustration, there is an immediate jolt of movement at the first glance. Beatrice's hand, placed in the middle of the illustration, leads the viewer's eyes upwards towards the light that blinds Dante. Dante's hands are raised in astonishment and he looks only at Beatrice, which acknowledges the portion of the canto where Beatrice's beauty overcomes Dante's entire self: "For like the sun that strikes the frailest eyes, so does the memory of her sweet smile deprive me of the use of my own mind."²⁰¹ The angelic sparks seem to be wistfully taken away by the power of the divine light as they weightlessly float towards the top left corner of the illustration.

Additionally, the figures of Dante and Beatrice are more translucently illustrated in this canto. In the earlier cantos of *Paradiso*, Botticelli uses dark and thick lines to create the figures of Dante and Beatrice, yet in this canto, the two figures seem lighter, emphasized by their flowing garments and feet that barely touch the ground. Dante appears to be the most translucent of the two. Of course, he is the outsider of the Empyrean, so Botticelli must depict him differently than Beatrice. Unlike Beatrice, his expression is unsteady and he appears extremely dependent on Beatrice's guidance. The illustration shows Dante's astonishment as he sees the divine light, "such was the living light encircling me, leaving me so enveloped by its veil of radiance that I could see not thing."²⁰² His pose is more vulnerable, while Beatrice's pose radiates strength. Her gaze towards Dante is informative and somewhat protective. By looking at and touching Dante, Beatrice informs him of the reality of the Empyrean. This canto also contains the last words of Beatrice, where she praises the heavenly city, discusses Emperor Henry VII's place on the throne, and denounces the corruption of the papacy. Although her last

²⁰¹ Dante, *Paradiso* XXX, 25-27; Dante/Mandelbaum (1982), 271.

²⁰² Dante, *Paradiso* XXX, 49-51; Dante/Mandelbaum (1982), 273.

words take place at the end of the canto, Botticelli foreshadows this event in Beatrice's gaze towards Dante and her composition in the illustration.

These six illustrations demonstrate the various ways that Botticelli presented his knowledge on Dante and the innovative artistic developments of Florence. Botticelli is able to communicate this by manipulating perspective, for example, creating his own type like the dual perspective of *Inferno* XX. Additionally, he takes artistic liberties in his interpretation of the text by purposefully neglecting parts of the canto, like in *Paradiso* XXX, to visually express Dante's literary intentions. In *Purgatorio* X, Botticelli succeeds in depicting two convincing, yet different realities of stone and flesh by using linear perspective, while simultaneously acknowledging the emergence of individual style of Florentine artists. Finally, Botticelli addresses himself as an artist and intellectual by including his signature on the *cartellino* of *Paradiso* XXVIII. None of this would have been as impressive without his awareness of Trecento illuminated manuscripts, and his involvement in the intellectual circles of Florence that supplied him with the knowledge to understand Dante's masterpiece.

Concluding Remarks

The illustrations of Dante's *Commedia* by Botticelli could not have reached this impressive status without the cultural rebirth of the Renaissance and the reclaiming of Dante that occurred in Florence. Florentine civic pride not only promoted Dante's text, but it also gave rise to a completely new status for the Florentine artist. Florence was the intellectual heart of Italy and was responsible for the production of new humanist and artistic developments. During both Dante and Botticelli's lifetimes, Florence radiated with dominance and intelligence.

The cultural superiority of Florence can be examined through the promotion of its spoken language through literature. In the 1300s, Dante wrote his *Commedia* in the Tuscan vernacular, which therefore conferred a great deal of worth to the language. Dante's *Commedia* not only created measurable realities of the mysteries of Christianity, but simultaneously commented on well-known ancient and contemporary figures. Since the text was written in the vernacular, any literate Florentine could read it; thus, its audience was much larger than any Latin text that would have been written at that time. Therefore, Dante's ideas of Italian imperialism, criticism of the papacy, separate yet equal power of church and state, the topography and philosophies of Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise were exposed to different classes, genders, and surrounding areas of Florence. Yet, it took a great deal of intelligence to fully understand Dante's extremely philosophical text, which was full of references that often only high-class intellectuals could understand. The *Commedia* required a careful analysis and an extensive knowledge on the many ancient and contemporary historical references that decorated the text. Nevertheless, the *Commedia* became a household book for Florentines in the fifteenth century, and was often read more than Homer and Virgil.

Dante's ideas in his *Commedia* established a deeper analysis on the moral self, and following the publication of his *Commedia*, many scholars supplied inward-thinking commentary on Dante's text that revolved around the morality of humankind. The Florentine writer, Petrarch, one of the earliest humanists, established humanist thinking that would dominate the Renaissance. He believed that the most valid subject of study was the study of man himself. Petrarch's contribution to the Renaissance was his persistent glorification of ancient texts and, like Dante, laying the foundation for the Tuscan vernacular. The new philosophical developments of humanism that emerged at the end of the 1300s introduced the concept of individual achievement, rather than the grim thinking of the Middle Ages that mostly focused on life after death.

The late 1300s also benefited from revolutionary Florentine artists like Giotto, who changed the perspective of art that would initiate the innovative artistic developments of the Renaissance. He broke away from Gothic and Byzantine styles and introduced the concept of portraying the reality of nature, which in turn generated the Renaissance artistic tradition of achieving reality through illusion. For that reason, the process of creating truly realistic art became more difficult and required a more intellectual method. Florentine artists like Alberti were beginning to express their own artistic theories through writing. Alberti's text, *De Pictura*, originally written in Italian, was groundbreaking for the advocacy of artists as intellectuals. He eventually translated his text into Latin, which indicates that his work was required by a more scholarly audience. In his text, Alberti's purpose was to demonstrate that a perfect work of art cannot be possible without the use of other liberal arts, like geometry, and an artist's natural born talent. Due to the establishment of Alberti's concept, Florence became a city where artists were

encouraged to express their ideas through their artwork and writings and eventually contribute to the scholarly works of Florence altogether.

During the Renaissance, the combination of the city's strong economy, intelligent writers, artists, architects, philosophers, and politicians made Florence an ideal location for superiority. Florence was a republic, and therefore its self-governed policies encouraged individual thought. Wealthy banking families like the Medici, that also held positions in the government, were in control of artisan guilds, thus they could express their own civic pride through artwork without difficulty. Fueled with competition, wealthy families invested in grandiose works of art to express their dedication to their city of Florence. Since the Medici invested in art as an expression of their own intelligence and civic pride, artists themselves were beginning to enjoy the more important title of "artist," rather than "craftsman."

Botticelli's illustrations can be seen as the embodiment of Florence's development as the reigning city of the Renaissance. The illustrations represent Florence's reclaiming of Dante because they were originally intended to accompany the Cristoforo Landino's commentary of the 1481 edition, the first Florentine edition of the *Commedia*, a project funded by the Medici. Although only nineteen were used, Botticelli continued the project in his own time, thus representing the new artistic license that developed during the mid-fifteenth century. In his illustrations, Botticelli utilized artistic developments, like linear perspective, that originated in Florence, which demonstrated his awareness and participation in the artistic discussions of Florence. When comparing Botticelli's illustrations to illuminated manuscripts of the Trecento, the outstanding artistic evolution of the Renaissance is evident. Botticelli understands how to manipulate reality through artistic illusion because the figures of his illustrations have more depth than those of the Trecento. Additionally, he included references to Florentine architecture

specific to certain Florentine architects, which demonstrated his awareness of the artists' new individual style and their contribution to the artistic field. At the same time, Botticelli's illustrations demonstrate that he was conscious of the circulating discussions on the similarities between poetry and painting, and participated in the exchanging of *ekphrases*, while at times having his illustrations read like a poem.

Most impressive, however, was that Botticelli was able to represent Dante's meaning of his text into a visual translation. He accurately rendered Dante's themes, motifs, and intertextual relationships with his own innovative artistic methods. The illustrations deserve more attention in this light, because they are one of Botticelli's most excellent works. Botticelli's illustrations are a true Renaissance version of the *Commedia*. The ninety-two illustrations of Dante's *Commedia* must be considered the most magnificent example of Florence's contribution to the cultural, intellectual, and artistic rebirth that was the Italian Renaissance.

Figures



Fig. 1. Sandro Botticelli, *Adoration of the Magi*, c. 1472-5, tempera on panel, 111 cm × 134 cm. Florence, Uffizi Gallery.



Fig. 2. Sandro Botticelli, *Calumny of Apelles*, c. 1495, tempera on panel. 62 cm × 91 cm. Florence, Uffizi Gallery.



Fig. 3. Sandro Botticelli, *Inferno XVIII*, c. 1480-1495, manuscript, 320 x 470 mm. Berlin, Staatliche Museen.



Fig. 4. Sandro Botticelli, *Purgatorio X*, c. 1480-1495, drawing on parchment, 320 x 470 mm. Berlin, Staatliche Museen.



Fig. 5. Sandro Botticelli, *Purgatorio XV*, c. 1480-1495, drawing on parchment, 320 x 470 mm. Berlin, Staatliche Museen.

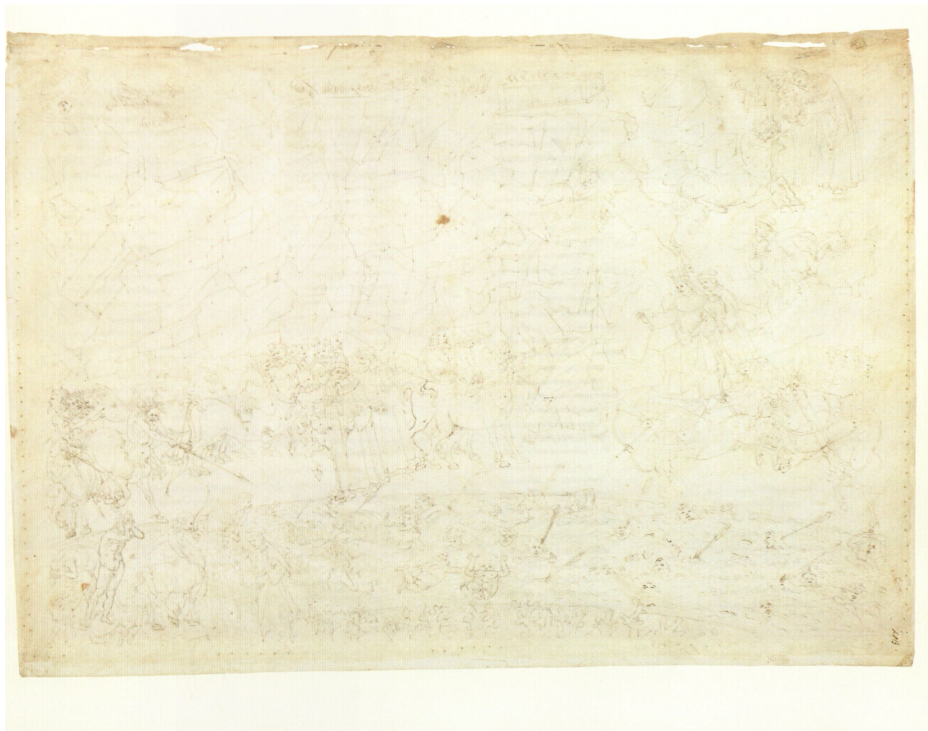


Fig. 6. Sandro Botticelli, *Inferno XII*, c. 1480-1495, drawing on parchment, 320 x 470 mm. Berlin, Staatliche Museen.

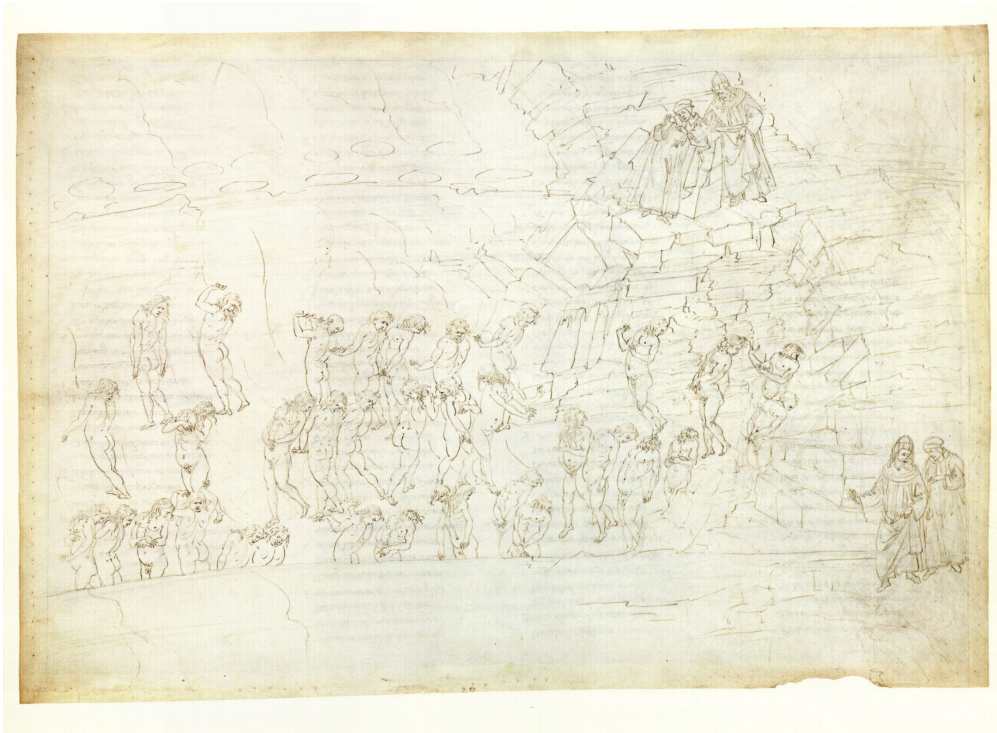


Fig. 7. Sandro Botticelli, *Inferno XX*, c. 1480-1495, drawing on parchment, 320 x 470 mm. Berlin, Staatliche Museen.



Fig. 8. Sandro Botticelli, *Paradiso XXVIII*, c. 1480-1495, drawing on parchment, 320 x 470 mm. Berlin, Staatliche Museen.

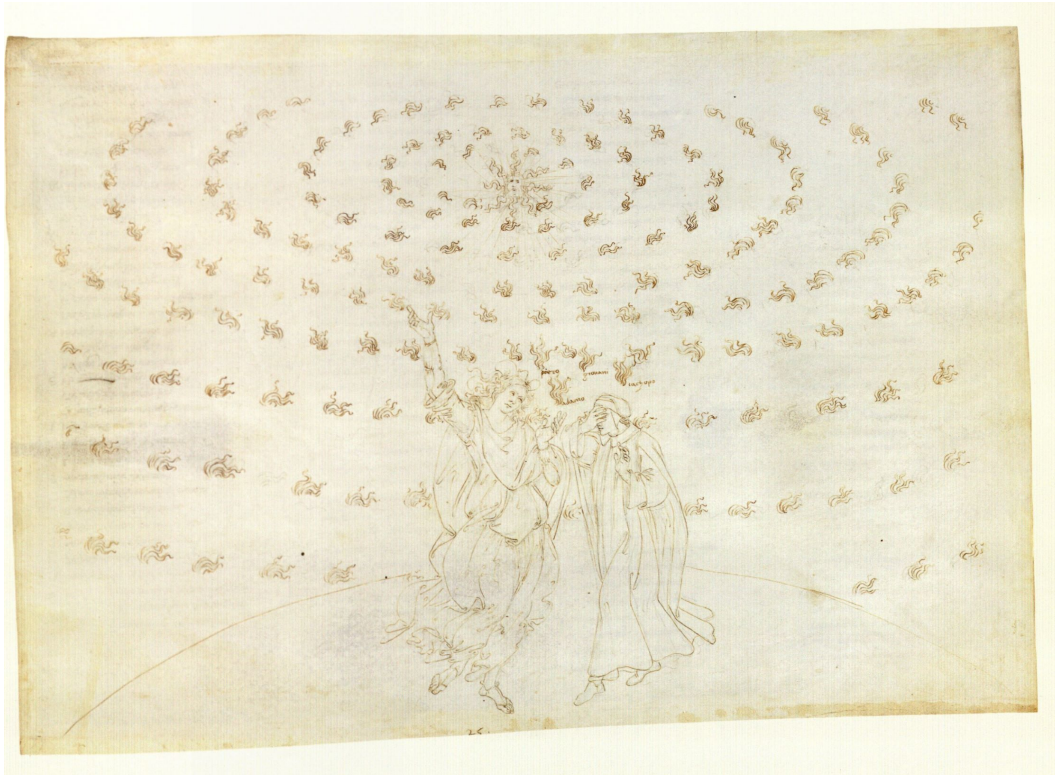


Fig. 9. Sandro Botticelli, *Paradiso XXVI*, c. 1480-1495, drawing on parchment, 320 x 470 mm. Berlin, Staatliche Museen.



Fig. 10. Sandro Botticelli, *Paradiso XXX*, c. 1480-1495, drawing on parchment, 320 x 470 mm. Berlin, Staatliche Museen.

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